TheVillage

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Issue #231 February 2023

NEWS & FEATURES from Alvechurch, Barnt Green, Blackwell, Burcot Beoley, Cofton Hackett, Finstall, Hopwood, Bordesley, Rowney Green, Lickey, Lickey End, Marlbrook, The Oakalls & everywhere in between!

TheVillage Issue 231 February 2023

inside

Bringing you village life for almost 25 years

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Lickey Parking Joy
Page 5

Wassail in the Hills
Pages 10-11

Goodbye 2022!
Pages 12-13

Village Weddings
Pages 25-31

Look and See
Pages 41-44

Front cover: Frosty February, photo taken by Village reader Dennis Brown.

Pictures/Keith Woolford

JUST PLAYING : Village communities have been in action welcoming the New Year and seeing off the old one in Mummers' plays, with St George in a starring role (above left) in the Lickey Hills, alongside poet Spoz, and adding to 'Liz Truss's' woes in the Alvechurch Morris event (above, right). **See Pages 10-13**

LICKEYS PARKING RELIEF

AFTER A SECOND public consultation in three years, Birmingham City Council has scrapped plans to introduce parking charges in the Lickey Hills Country Park.

The decision has been welcomed with relief by villagers who feared that the charges would displace cars on to nearby roads and verges – and by those who want to be able to enjoy visiting the Lickeys.

The plan to introduce charges at the car parks on Monument Lane, Rose Hill and at the Visitor Centre was first raised in 2019, but was put on hold during the pandemic.

It came forward again towards the end of last year with an online consultation and a meeting in November at the Visitor Centre.

A large turnout of villagers made it clear to the city council partnership manager for parks and nature conservation, Matt Hageney, that charges would make the parking-related problems already experienced by locals even worse.

As one correspondent to *The Village* wrote in the last issue: "It is madness and will adversely affect the ability of many families to continue to enjoy the amazing facilities."

INFORMATION (from left): Matt Hageney, of Birmingham City Council, Coun Adrian Kriss, of Worcestershire County Council, and Steve Hinton, head of ranger services, at the November consultation.

The city council, it seems, listened to villagers and decided not to go ahead with the plan, particularly during the current cost-of-living crisis.

Coun Bakul Kumar, chairman of Lickey & Blackwell Parish Council, told *The Village:* "It is good news for the users of Lickey Hills and the residents around the area that Birmingham City Council has decided not to go ahead.

"The parish council engaged with Birmingham in November 2022, challenging the mixed messages it was sending to the residents of Birmingham by promoting a healthier lifestyle and wellbeing and encouraging them to go outdoors by enjoying walking in the parks and yet intending to charge them in the present financial circumstances.

"We as the parish council hope that people will come to the Lickey Hills and benefit from walking outdoors and enjoying a healthier lifestyle."

‘Really grateful’ for community larder scheme

THE ALVECHURCH Community Larder is to consider increasing to two days a week in response to demand for its services.

Coun Keith Wiseman, a parish councillor and member of the larder steering group, told the council that numbers had dropped a little over Christmas, but then had gone up to 39 in the new year.

“We have several families in the village now who are really struggling. The people who are coming down are really grateful,” he said.

The steering group was going to discuss whether they needed to double up to two sessions a week, but this wouldn’t be happening until the larder had been running for at least ten weeks.

Meanwhile, the Warm Spaces initiative co-ordinated by Barnt Green Parish Council had seen little demand, the parish council heard.

Chairman Robert Cholmondeley said they would continue with the scheme and review it towards the end of February.

Coun Phil Perry pointed out that the weather had been fairly mild and the latest cold snap might see more people wanting to use a warm space.

BARNT GREEN’S annual Wassail Walk was declared “another success” by parish chairman Robert Cholmondeley, who said the “terrible” weather stopped in time for the event and around 50 people, including the group pictured above, took part.

Green Belt field ‘never developed’

AN APPLICATION to build 34 affordable homes on a Green Belt site in Hopwood has been objected to by Alvechurch Parish Council, which emphasised that “it has never been previously developed land”.

In its objection to the plan for the site, to the east of the roundabout in Hopwood, the council says: “Further references to its alleged ‘brownfield’ character do not, through repetition, make the case that it is previously developed land.”

■ Bromsgrove District Council planners have dramatically increased the number of enforcement actions they are taking to crack down on people abusing planning rules, Barnt Green Parish Council heard.

District councillor Charlie Hotham gave figures that in 2021-22, 268 planning enforcement cases were raisied, but only two enforcement notices were issued.

This contrasted with just one month last autumn, from October 1 to November 10, when 26 cases were raised, six enforcement notices issued and an additional five being prepared for issue.

Flood warning

BARNT GREEN Parish Council is to buy and install a flood level marker beneath the railway bridge at the bottom of Hewell Lane. Flood water gathers in the dip during heavy rain and the marker will show motorists the depth of the water.

Poop plea

VILLAGERS are being urged to pick up their dog’s mess after a surge in reports of the problem.

Alvechurch Parish Council heard in particular about dog mess being left on streets in the George Road/ Withybed Lane area. It appeared, however, that this had become a bigger problem everywhere.

Acting chairman Coun Tony Wallis said: “Other than putting cameras up, I don’t know what we could do.”

Coun Sam Lewis said: “The only way to do it is to have dog owners tell the other dog owners to pick up – and they will have a bag to offer to the other dog owner.”

District councillor Charlie Hotham, who is also a Barnt Green parish councillor, told the meeting: ”It is exactly the same everywhere. I think all you can really do is a publicity drive.”

He recalled that Barnt Green Parish Council once bought some bright orange spray, which one of the councillors used to highlight dog mess on pavements.

“The idea was it makes the next person more conscious that they should be picking up. I’m not sure that it works.”

Picnic date

THE ALVECHURCH Picnic in the Park is to be held on Sunday May 28 – a bank holiday weekend - Alvechurch councillors heard. The event, held at The Meadows playing fields, has become a popular fixture in village life since it was launched more than ten years ago.

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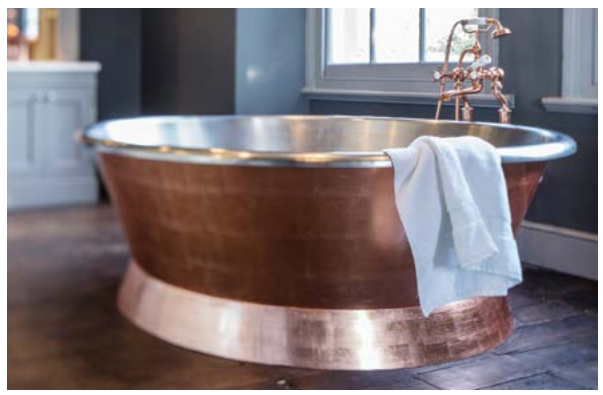

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Keyless car? Get a wheel lock, say police

VILLAGERS are being urged to double up on car security after police warned of a "massive spike" of car thefts in the area.

PC Stuart Head, of the Alvechurch and Wythal local policing team, told Alvechurch Parish Council's meeting that cars with keyless ignitions were a particular target.

"I know it is an expense, but I recommend fitting a lock that goes over the steering wheel.

"My car was broken into and I have bought one."

Acting chairman Coun Tony Wallis commented: "It sort of defeats the object of a keyless car, doesn't it?

"It's criminal that someone has the ability to walk up and steal your car off your drive."

PC Head said: "The car manufacturers need to step up."

Meanwhile, with the possibility of further frosty mornings over coming weeks, the local policing team is continuing to urge villagers not to leave running vehicles unattended in their driveways while they defrost.

CPSO Mark Hyder told parish councillors he had found 32 cars unattended, with their engines running while their screens defrosted, in one morning in Alvechurch.

And he warned: "It is not just high performance cars they want to steal, it is all cars.

"They will steal your car to use to commit another crime," he added.

Inside view (it was pouring down outside!): Barnt Green parish councillor Olivia Polton (left) with the parish Christmas 2022 Best Dressed Window winners at Riley and Carruthers hair salon in Sandhills Road.

Station lifts back on track

MORE THAN seven years after a new footbridge was installed between the platforms at Barnt Green rail station, parish councillors are again allowing themselves to believe work to install lifts for those who can't manage the steps is imminent.

Only last November, *The Village* reported that their latest hopes had been dashed by Government mayhem, with parish chairman Robert Cholmondeley, on hearing the project needed Ministerial approval, lamenting: "We will probably have a new Transport Minister in two weeks!"

This was after the on-off lifts project had dragged on for year after year, leaving disabled passengers having to go to extraordinary lengths to reach the correct platform, including catching a train to Redditch in order to then come back the other way to get to Birmingham.

But now Coun Cholmondeley says there is real hope. "We chased up Network Rail and we got a response back with the news: they have got the approval from the Transport Minister to proceed," he told the parish council monthly meeting in January.

"It is fantastic news. Obviously they need to schedule the work, but the implication I took was that it could start around spring time.

"And if they are putting in an electricity supply for the lifts, I think we should get on to West Midland Trains and ask about getting screens on Platform 1 because at the moment there is nothing to give passengers information and it is hopeless."

The council is still pressing for the pavement on Hewell Lane to be resurfaced. Coun Charlie Hotham said: "For now, Hewell Lane is the disabled access to the railway platform, but there is no way you can drive a mobility scooter up the pavement it is so bad."

Words and pictures by Keith and Simon Woolford

The Village

THERE'S SOMETHING IN THE WOODS!

THE annual Lickey Hills Wassail was held on the second Saturday of January in the Lickey Hills Country Park. The old, rural tradition was hosted by the enthusiastic park rangers to celebrate the Community Orchard and ensure a bountiful harvest for the year.

A record crowd of 260 visitors gathered to join the 2023 Wassail, which was a fantastic family event.

Steve Hinton, Head of Ranger Services, led the team but shortly into the evening started to lose his voice.

At the Visitor Centre, the King Bean and Queen Pea were crowned, chosen from a random draw of those who gathered there. They ceremoniously led the procession down Drover's Way to the nearby Community Orchard.

The official welcome was made, before everyone was invited through the arch of fairy lights and processed around the orchard, making a great noise to scare off evil spirits and promote a bountiful harvest for the coming season.

The weather held out for the evening, and no spirits were dampened, allowing the crowd to enjoy the Mummers' Play and warmed apple juice with cinnamon and added spices afterwards.

This year, the Mummers' Play was: *Wassail Hard with Vengeance*, with five "Evil Overlords" laying waste to the countryside and Lickey in particular. Thankfully, St George was on hand to rescue the day with his trusted steed 'Ole Oss. The very amateur dramatic players were made up of fellow rangers and members of The Lickey Hills Society, plus special guest Spoz as Wishy Washy Rishi.

Following the play, all the fruit trees in the orchard were adorned by lights and villagers placed sodden toast on branches to offer sustenance.

One comment, typical of the many received, was from Nicky Stanley saying "Thank you to everyone who put the event together. A lovely, and slightly bonkers, event. See you next year".

So, until then. . . Wassail Hard!

Clockwise from above: The Wassail's large turnout processes to the orchard to ward off evil spirits; Queen Pea and King Bean lead the procession with lanterns; a young fairy processes through the woods; ranger Steve Hinton opens the Wassail; St George readies to defeat the Evil Overlords; The Mummers' players take applause.

Clockwise from above: King Bean and Queen Pea with ranger Steve Hinton; players entertaining the crowd during the Mummers' Play; offerings of sustenance are left on the trees; the crowd gathered to listen to Steve Hinton; one of the Evil Overlords of the Lickey Hills; hot drinks are ladled out to welcome hands.

The Village New Year

That's a wrap on 2022

AS is tradition on New Year's Day, villagers gathered at The Crown pub in Alvechurch to ring in 2023 and say goodbye to 2022 with a drink, and to watch the Mummers' play.

Morris dancing kicked off the New Year's festivities, with performances from different groups, Alvechurch Morris being joined by other Morris groups including Aelfgythe, Plum Jerkin, Black Adder and Jockey Morris.

Following the dancing, the Alvechurch Morris men's review of 2022, as always, provided many laughs and a few shouts of "he's behind you".

The play was, as always, narrated by Old Father Time and featured appearances from the new King and Liz Truss among regular favourites Beelzebub the Turkish Knight and The Doctor (and his friend Little Dick Nip).

This year's play addressed many topical issues, including workers striking for more pay to keep up with inflation, Liz Truss's tenure as Prime Minister, where she was outlasted by a lettuce (the lettuce also made an appearance) and a Russian, who was met with plenty of boos.

The play finished with a soliloquy from King Charles III, who feared he will never be as popular as his mother.

This year, the play was held under a marquee to shelter players and the audience from the elements, although this restricted views for some.

After the play, the Morris dancers made their way to the The Weighbridge pub, where they once again entertained a crowd.

For those who haven't experienced the Mummers' Play yet, *The Village* recommends a good walk to shake off any fuzzy heads, followed by a drink to nurse while watching the play next New Year's Day.

But first, we must see what 2023 brings and guess what might appear in 2024's production . . .

■ **You can contribute to the "Doctor's Fee" at: www.justgiving.com/page/alvechurch-morris-men-1672595710977**

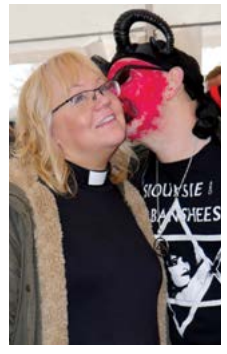
Steampunk chic: Aelfgythe Border Morris stun in silver.

Familiar faces: Alvechurch Morris men in their first outfits of the day.

Above: music accompanies Aelfgythe.
Below: The Morris Men clash sticks.

Above: Jockey Morris mid-hop.
Below: Russia vs England.

The play's the thing (above): 2023's line up of characters make up the Alvechurch Morris Men Mummers' play.



Clockwise from left: The Morris union strikers invade the play; St George takes on the dragon; Belzebub examines the dead, Alvechurch Morris at The Weighbridge; the Mummers' play is introduced; Plum Jerkin Morris dancers clash sticks; thumbs up from Blackadder Morris; members of Aelfgythe; Sweet Moll; and Rev Gail accepts a kiss from an unlikely character.

Not your average knitting group

A GROUP of talented villagers meet regularly in The Lounge, Alvechurch. The Knit and Natter group creates wonderful pieces of knitwear, toys and more - including our *Village* Vinny hedgehogs!

You might have seen them around . . . the group run popular tabletop sales in Alvechurch and the surrounding areas, where they raise money for chosen charities.

In December, Knit and Natter presented cheques for £500 to both The Lounge and Penny Church, to go towards the charity Brain Tumour Research. Penny's son, Finlay, died of a brain tumour in 2015. Penny was also running a raffle for a delicious hamper of goods to raise money.

This was the second donation to both The Lounge and Brain Tumour Research the ladies of Knit and Natter made in 2022, and all money was raised through sales of their brilliant knits. At many of their events, almost all of their creations have been sold at bargain prices of £5 or under. Cynthia Lawson, Chair of Knit and Natter said "Thank you, the people of Alvechurch are so generous."

Talented ladies: Knit and Natter gather in The Lounge for Christmas to celebrate their achievements over 2022.

Charitable donations: Daphne Cross (left) presents Sarah James with a donation towards The Lounge, and Cynthia Lawton (right) hands Penny Church a cheque for Brain Tumor Research

Jake swings into Europe

BARNT Green youngster Jake Jeff-Johnston, who is a junior at the Bromsgrove Golf Academy, has qualified and been selected to play in the World Junior Golf Championships in Portugal in February.

Jake took part in a qualifying event in Cambridge, and was assessed on his previous results, his golf handicap and the consistency of his performances.

Big dreams: Jake prepares for Portugal.

He has been a member of the Golf Academy since he was three, and has been coached by Rob Laing and his team for the last seven years.

The Championships in Portugal will be a three-day long event, where Jake who will be competing in the 10-12 age group, will have to prove his skills against some of the best young golfers in the world.

IN December, Martin Clarke, the Alvechurch Village Society treasurer, presented a Christmas card and a bank transfer of £200 from the society to Sarah James, the manager of The Lounge.

Each year AVS makes donations to the Lounge and to the Village Hall, usually from the profits from its social events and quiz nights.

This year the society had a smaller Christmas party at The Weighbridge but continues to support the good work of The Lounge.

LEADING LIVE-IN CARE

When you need to consider full-time care, you may think that your only choice is to uproot your life, and move into a care home. This is not the case . . . there is another option; live-in care from a company like **Promedica24**.

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- Grzegorz Wrzosek, Country Manager

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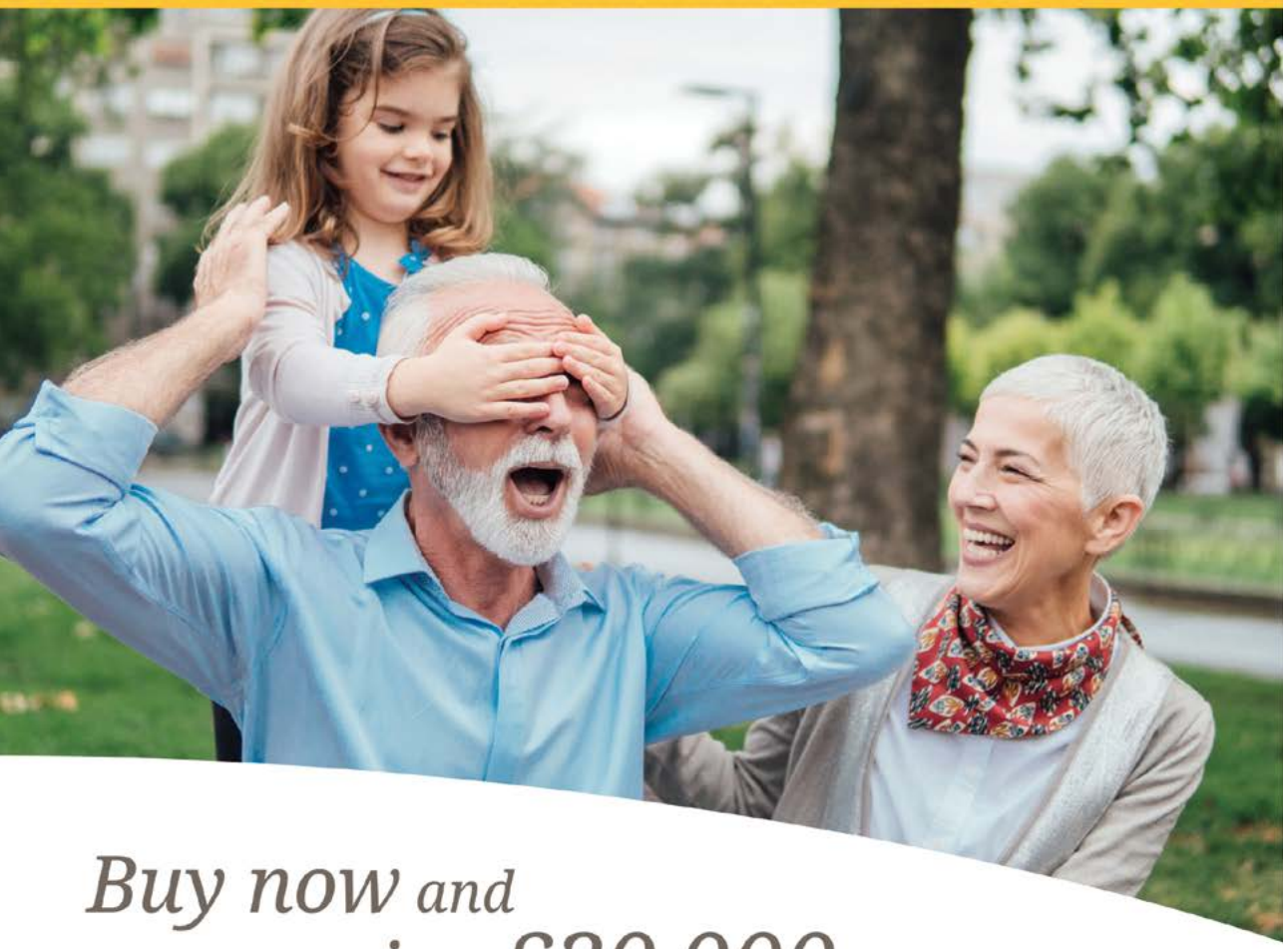
Cathy Rice, West Midlands Regional Partner, said: *"As a Registered Nurse with over 20 years of experience, I feel passionately about facilitating the independence and protecting the wellbeing of the people I care for. "For many people, the best care choice could be to receive support at home and I look forward to working with the local community to find the right care solutions for their families."*

If you are investigating care options for yourself, or a loved one, and would like to learn more about live-in care, reach out to Cathy on: c.rice@promedica24.co.uk 01905 677099

Scan the QR code to learn more about Promedica24 and their Live-In Care Services.



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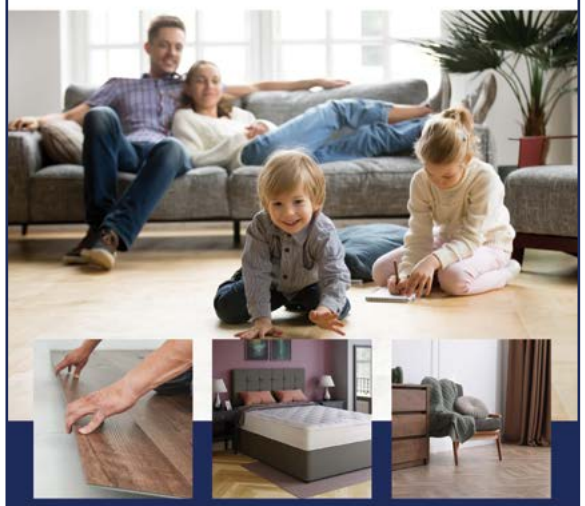

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Your ticket to the waterways

THE Worcester-Birmingham & Droitwich Canals Society's own narrowboat has now been returned to her regular moorings on the canal by Bridge 60 near Station Road, Alvechurch, *writes Tony Brannon*.

Many spectators joined her homecoming for a champagne reception. Alvechurch Parish Council chairman Marc Worrall was on hand to say a few words and welcome her home.

Cecilia (pictured above) has undergone a complete interior refit and exterior paint job over the past two years. In all, nearly £25,000 has been spent on her. The boat is now officially designated as a "community" boat.

She is available for groups of people to enjoy the local waterways for very low cost. The society offers half and full day trips in return for a donation to the society, which is a charity.

The trips are fully crewed by a team of trained volunteers. Up to 12 people (excluding crew) can be accommodated onboard.

■ **More information can be found by visiting: www.wbdcs.org.uk.**

Toasting the boat: A champagne reception for *Cecilia*

FRESH 'REFUJUICE'

A Bromsgrove refugee support group has squeezed its latest vintage of fund-raising apple juice.

The project, now in its sixth year, involves the ancient tradition of gleaning, an activity described in the Hebrew Bible where, once a farmer has completed the commercial harvest, people collect any produce that's been left behind.

Sales of the product, called "Refujuice", provide a vital annual income of nearly £2000 for Bromsgrove & Redditch Welcome Refugees (BRWR), helping to pay for both practical and financial support for refugees in and around the two towns.

Two tons of apples were gleaned at Bentleys Castle Fruit Farm in Castle Trump, Gloucestershire. The harvest was then pulped, pressed, pasteurised and bottled over three days at Pershore College.

One of the gleaners was Ukrainian refugee Veronika Ivankova, who fled to the UK with her Russian husband. They lived in Ukraine's second city, Kharkiv, on the border with Russia.

"This day was super exciting for me," she said. "It was filled with bright emotions, positive and to be honest, unforgettable."

Veronika helped fellow Ukrainian refugees in the Polish capital Warsaw early in 2022 and knows how valuable support can be. "I was a refugee in a few countries this year, and I know how helpful even small things are. So now, I want to make small things for other people and be the person who makes someone else's life a little bit better.

And Veronika found the apple gleaning was very rewarding. "I can't say that it was super hard, just a few hours of light workout," she added. "And the sound of falling apples is soooo satisfying!"

But the pressing and bottling is hard graft, although Maz Salmou was keen to help. Four years ago, he became the first Syrian refugee to come to Bromsgrove and receive support from BRWR.

"The project is brilliant. Refujuice is great and I hope it can be expanded in the future to help more people and to reduce the amount of waste in food.

Chilly but cheery: Veronika at the apple gleaning.

The Gleaners: Celebrating a good picking.

"I do enjoy doing it, and it's really good to give something back to the group and to the whole community."

Maz came to the UK four years ago with no English, and was supported by BRWR. Now, he is creating a documentary film about Refujuice as part of his MA course at the Birmingham City University.

Joy Bourne, the Refujuice coordinator, was delighted with this year's vintage. "The gleaning is always a really happy, sociable day," she explained. "You need a certain level of stamina for the juicing, but it's also a lot of fun and a good experience! It's something a bit different, and it's really a lovely thing to do once a year."

The 1,500 bottles of Refujuice are already on sale at £9 for three 0.75 litre bottles or £35 for a case of 12. Local home delivery is included.

Orders can be placed at refujuice.brwr@gmail.com and you can find more information at www.brwr.uk.

Words and pictures by Bob Jefford.

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COMMUNITY CHRISTMAS

Burcot Grange and The Lodge opened their doors to the community for a spectacular Christmas fun day, inviting visitors to join residents for a day with Santa, and his reindeer.

STAFF and residents at Burcot Grange and Lodge, a luxury care home in Bromsgrove and a part of the Berkley Care Group, invited the local community to an all-day Christmas event on Thursday 8 December 2022. The event was full of festive fun and activities from a visit to Santa's grotto to feed his reindeer, to taking part in a Christmas trail.

Those who attended had the chance to meet Santa and his elves in their grotto, as well as the opportunity to pet and feed Santa's real reindeer.

The event began at Burcot Lodge where guests enjoyed home-made mince pies and the care home's famous shortbread, as well as cold and hot drinks, including mulled wine. There was also the opportunity for children to take part in a festive drawing session with residents.

"It was so lovely to have this festive fun day together as a community. That's what Christmas is all about!"

After meeting Santa and his reindeer, guests enjoyed live music from a fairground organ, while children who attended could take part in a Christmas trail through Burcot's beautiful gardens. The festive-full day ended at Burcot Grange, where visitors could explore a Christmas market with stalls selling Christmas decorations, candles, homemade Christmas cards, shawls and much more before they warmed up with teas, coffees, hot chocolate, and mulled wine.

Burcot Grange and Lodge teamed up with charities for the event, including The Phoenix Children's Foundation, which enriches the lives of young people and their families living with illness, disability, or lack of opportunity. The Foundation provided the reindeer for the event.

The star of the show: Santa and his elves met with visitors.

Family fun: Present time!

Santas knee: A seat for all.

The Grange and Lodge also took donations of nearly £200 on the day for the Primrose Hospice, an independent charity based in Northeast Worcester that supports patients with life-limiting illnesses, and their families.

Commenting on the event, General Manager of Burcot Grange and Lodge Vicky Osborne said:

"Staff and residents were so pleased to host this festive event for the community. We are dedicated to ensuring that Burcot Grange and Lodge plays an important part in the local community. This Christmas fete was an opportunity for people of all ages to come together and join in with some Christmas fun.

"It was fantastic for our residents and their families to connect with the local community at this special time of year, as well as a great opportunity to raise money for charity.

"We loved seeing loads of faces, both old and new!"

Also commenting on the festive-fuelled day, one resident of The Grange said: "I was so pleased to have hosted this Christmas event for everyone in the community. I absolutely love the joy and tradition of Christmas, for children and grownups alike!

"It was so lovely to have this festive fun day together as a community. That's what Christmas is all about!"

Let's revisit piazza plan

Dear Editor – I sympathise with the concerns of "Worried, Alvechurch" from the last issue, but perhaps they can suggest how the problem can be solved?

I would refer you to my proposal for dealing with the problems of traffic in Alvechurch village centre, published by *The Village* magazine about 20 years ago.

You will not be surprised to learn that little has happened to improve the situation, apart from a few bollards and a 20mph limit.

The pages of this magazine normally contain references to traffic problems, but it must be appreciated that any attempt by Government or local authority to "grasp the nettle" and rigidly control traffic for the benefit of the population is political suicide.

Our legislators will talk about it, have a meeting and kick the can down the road.

David Barton, Weatheroak

A note from the Editor: *The drawing (below) of a continental-style, pedestrian-only square in Alvechurch village centre was created by David Barton and first published in* The Village *magazine more than 20 years ago, after being raised by the now-defunct Village Improvements Committee – which also reflects how long this parking and speeding situation has been trundling along for.*

There was a lot of interest in the pedestrianised piazza at the time, however, despite having backing from the then-head of highways, the ambitious idea of handing the village centre back to pedestrians never materialised. In 2017 it was once again brought to the table and once again, nothing happened, although a survey carried out at Picnic in the Park suggested a majority were in favour of a part-pedestrianised village centre.

Piazza Alvechurch: Could it be time to resurrect this idea?

Bunny thanks

Dear Editor – I just wanted to say a big thank you to Alex Nowek for submitting the picture (above, right) of a rabbit caught against the full moon rising over Bordesley in the last issue of *The Village*. We live on the A441 at Bordesley and my husband and I are often spellbound by the wonderful sight of the moon emerging slowly above the hills and fields opposite our house, at first just a slither appears then inch by inch the mystical moon shows itself in full glory, it's feels spiritual and the rabbit makes it even more so. Nature at it's very best!

Anyway, thank you Alex your picture makes me smile each time I see it. It would make a wonderful print so if you are doing any please let me know; I would love to purchase one.

R Kelly, Bordesley

Have your say . . . about anything!

email: editor@villageonline.co.uk
or write to: Letters, The Village, The Limes, Swan Street, Alvechurch B48 7RR

Please include your name and address – even if you request them to be withheld from publication. We reserve the right to edit submissions for reasons of space or legality.
The deadline for the next issue is February 10th 2023.

WHERE'S VINNY?

DOTTY George, aged seven from Alvechurch and a pupil at Crown Meadow First School, is the first winner of a Mini Vinny in 2023. Here she shows off the Mini Vinny she won in December/January's hunt the hedgehog competition in *The Village*.

If you want to win one for yourself, you'll need to try to find the little hedgehog hiding somewhere in this magazine (the one shown above is just a guide).

Tell us where he's hiding via email or post – see details on bottom of the page opposite – and please include your name, address and phone number, and we'll draw a winner at random.

The closing date is midnight on February 6 2023. We'll let you know if you've won and you can collect your Mini Vinny from our office – and pose for a photo with your prize!

Help the bells ring

Dear Editor – If you're at a loose end in the New Year, come to St Laurence in Alvechurch and start bell ringing. It's an activity that gives you a bit of exercise twice a week, keeps the brain ticking over and draws you into a different aspect of village life.

You don't need to be strong, musical, or mathematical to ring bells. The heaviest bell at Alvechurch weighs 12 cwt (600 kg) but ringing is a matter of technique rather than strength and ringers range from around ten years old to over 90.

The only real requirement is that you have to be tall enough to reach the rope and have hands large enough to grasp it.

Church bells aren't rung to make musical tunes. At its simplest, they're just rung in sequence, a descending scale from the treble to the tenor bell.

This becomes boring for ringers (and listeners) after a while and one alternative is to follow a traditional pattern known as a method; the oldest of these, *Grandsire*, dates back to the 17th century. There are interesting mathematical principles behind method ringing – some readers will immediately recognise why there are 5,040 changes in a peal on seven bells – but you don't need to go into these unless you want to start composing a new method. In everyday ringing you follow the rules of the method and patterns emerge.

The bells ring for church service every Sunday morning and for weddings when they're requested. They also ring for special occasions such as Christmas and Remembrance Sunday. There's a regular practice night every Tuesday.

Alvechurch Bell Ringers have an Open Afternoon on Saturday 25th February from 2 until 4 pm. There can only be a couple of people learning in the tower at a time so it'd be helpful if you can book a session before the day. Speak to any of the ringers to learn more or email alvechurchbells@yahoo.co.uk.

Geoff Franklin
Alvechurch Bell Ringers

20 From The Village archive Years Ago

THE COVER of the February 2003 issue is of JNP 400, a famous Dellow car from the Alvechurch factory. James Harvey, of the Dellow Register - a club celebrating this special sports car - tells The Village about how it first rolled into being in Alvechurch. In 1946, Ken Delingpole and Ron Lowe set up Dellow Motors, and, in 1950 after 20 or more prototype cars completed, Dellow Motors went into production using parts supplied by Ford. The Dellow was designed for the sporting motorist who also required a car for every day use. When the old factory was pulled down, the road which now stands in its place, was called "Dellow Grove".

COSY, CANAL-SIDE VALUE

Liz Dove enjoyed a family meal at The Weighbridge. Those local to Alvechurch will likely be aware and fond of the pub, but for those from further afield, you'll find The Weighbridge at Alvechurch Marina on Scarfield Hill. After a long walk along the canal, Liz described The Weighbridge like "being in your own dining room at home with the small, intimate eating and friendly atmosphere". With plates piled high with roast beef Sunday lunches, there was not a trace of food left by the time they had finished - including the children's vegetables, always a sign of culinary triumph! The Weighbridge has since been taken over by Chris Lamb, however you'll find the same warm welcome, good food and plenty of beer.

NORDIC NUANCES

With its impressive Catherine wheel window, St Catherine's stands out in the heart of Blackwell. The original church was known locally as the Tin Tabernacle and was originally made of wooden construction on blue brick foundations with a slate roof. In the 1930s the church was in very poor repair and it was decided to demolish it and build a new one in its place. The foundation stone was laid in May 1939 and the building almost finished by the end of the year. The church is built in Norwegian style. The architect was Herbert North, of Llanfaifechan in North Wales. The emblems of the 12 apostles and of Christ's Passion are painted on the ceiling using Norwegian national colours. St Catherine's was given a listed buildings status in 2001.

10 From The Village archive Years Ago

THE COVER of our February 2013 issue is a wintery view of Alvechuch, with St Laurence Church in the distance. The photo was taken after a heavy snowfall, as seen from Newbourne Hill.

ALIEN IN THE CELLAR

Local historians Ian and Rachel Hayes reported on a strange sighting under Cofton Hall.

They were exploring the cellar systems at the hall after speculation about how far they extended beyond the hall and even that they led to the Barnt Green Inn (formerly Bant Green House).

They found that there was no evidence of a passage to the pub, but there was another mystery: the figure depicted in the photograph (above right) was not seen when Ian and Rachel visited the Hall, it was only discovered after the images were developed. It wasn't thought to be the salts in the brickwork, and said "It would be interesting to see if it is still there."

Maybe now, 10 years later, it's time we found out . . .

THE QUAKER WAY

Barnt Green's Quakerwarden, Sean Tomas Beag, took a villager on a journey of discovery. While counting 36 retail shops on Barnt Green High Street, Mr Beag met a woman who enquired as to what he was doing. They ended up going for a cup of tea to discuss everything from what Quakers "actually do", to whether the Lickeys is at the top of Barnt Green or Alvechurch. Mostly an account of their conversation, Mr Beag discusses what the Barnt Green Quakers do when they meet.

GET WEDDING READY

Whether you're in need of a regular massage, searching for a salon to rejuvenate your skin or looking for an expert to give you the perfect wedding day manicure, the friendly team at **Lunatips** are the ones to call.

IN Cofton Hackett, you'll find the Lunatips salon, and when you enter, it's a bit like stepping into a friend's house. The team of women working there are friendly, warm and make sure everyone feel welcome.

Helen Jenkinson, established Lunatips in 2013, her aim was to create a comfortable space where clients wouldn't feel intimidated, and provide an escape from the hustle and bustle of lives of those who need it.

As a busy mom of two herself, Helen knew the need for a peaceful haven away from the stresses and strains of everyday life.

Helen wanted to make clients feel like they were visiting friends, while also offering high quality treatments from experts with a great standard of education and knowledge.

The small team of five dedicated therapists at Lunatips are passionate about making people feel beautiful in their own skin and special for occasions. Most of the team have been working with Helen for more than five years, and enjoy working in a social space that feels like spending the day with friends.

Lunatips offers treatments ranging from gel nails and pedicures in the friendly and chatty salon floor, to full body massages and lash treatments, in relaxing and spa-like private treatment rooms.

YOUR WEDDING PREP

When asked what treatments brides and grooms often book when they get in touch with Lunatips for their pre-wedding pampering, Helen said: "Lots of brides get in touch to have their nails done perfectly for the wedding day, some will come in beforehand to have a trial for their hen do, and we find that many often stay with us and become regulars after their wedding as they loved their nails so much.

A warm welcome: Helen (centre left) with some of the friendly and talented Lunatips therapists.

"Grooms also like to make sure their hands looks nice for the wedding, and come in for a manicure to make their nails look neat.

"Our Ultimate CACI facial is a really popular treatment for our brides and grooms to-be, as it's quite an intensive treatment which helps with collagen production and make your face feel firmer and skin plumper with visibly fewer fine lines and wrinkles. [CACI stands for Computer Aided Cosmetology Instrument, and the instrument uses microcurrents at an ultra-low frequency to stimulate the muscles in your face, toning your facial muscles by stimulating collagen production and triggering tissue repair and skin rejuvenation. The CACI facial, although pleasant, isn't a relaxing facial, but those who have had it claim that they can feel it working as it happens.]

An escape: The perfect place to relax and treat yourself.

"Of course, a full body massage in the days before the wedding can be a great way to unwind and relax ahead of the big day."

If you're in need of a regular treatment, something special for your wedding day, or just want to unwind this year, Lunatips offers a wide range of relaxing and effective treatments and their friendly team are always happy to advise on what might be best for you.

Get in touch for a friendly consultation or to book your appointment today:
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TIME TO START PLANNING

HAPPY NEW YEAR! It's a few weeks late now, but we hope you had a lovely festive season and indulged yourselves a bit. We all know that with the new year comes resolutions, promises and pacts around getting fitter, eating less sugar, drinking less alcohol . . .

If you do decide you'd like to get fitter in 2023, there are plenty of local groups and clubs to explore.

You'll find many of these listed in *The Village*, pilates and group exercise classes, yoga and walking groups . . . the list goes on.

We love connecting people with a new hobby or interest, especially if it's one that helps them meet people in the community at the same time.

OUR TOP TIPS

Our top tips for trying out something new are:

- **Look in our Health and Beauty section,** Directory and What's On section, where you'll find groups and classes to get involved in.
- **Reach out to the class instructor or group leader** if you're nervous about starting something new, or what the session entails. In our experience they're a helpful bunch happy to provide details (and maybe go easy on you for the first session!)
- **Take a friend**, we all know things aren't as daunting when you're not alone.
- **Give it a go**. Recently we tried Clubbercise, and were pleasantly surprised, not just at what a great (and sweaty!) work-out it was, but also how large and friendly the class was - and the instructor!

TIME TO START PLANNING

Christmas and New Year is also peak marriage proposal time, so chances are you might have just got engaged (congratulations!)- or know someone who has.

If you're starting to plan your wedding, or already deep in the planning process then hair stylists, makeup artists and beauticians may be on your list. We'd encourage you to look locally, there are many talented artists in our villages, whether working from salons or from their homes you'll be able to find an expert to suit your needs.

Pretty in pink: Sparkly wedding nails, created by Lunatips.

Staci Marshall, Wedding and Events Manager at Brockencote Hall (who is also planning her own wedding this summer!) said: "Once you have your venue booked (this is usually the most important bit), the next things on a couple's list are booking key suppliers like their photographer, entertainment, florist and hair and makeup.

"It's important that when you are booking your suppliers you feel comfortable with them, and feel able to tell them if you love or dislike something, so you're not compromising for something you didn't ask for. It's also a good idea to shop around, and find stylists whose work you really admire and fit your personal - and your wedding's - style!

"For example, usually a rustic venue often doesn't fit with a super glam hairstyle, but that's not to say it can't! Whatever you do, make sure your day is about you and your partner."

Classic nails: French tips, a natural clean wedding look.

It's not quite wedding season yet, but it will be here soon, so if you're a bride or groom looking to book in your pre-wedding (or pre-honeymoon!) treatments, the salons and experts available to you locally are second to none.

Of course, it's not just the wedding party who like to be pampered - if you're going to a wedding this spring and are looking for somewhere to get your hair, lashes or nails done, you needn't look far.

As spring and summer (and "wedding season") approach, we'd encourage you to try out a few different local businesses and book appointments well in advance to avoid disappointment - especially for a big day!

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Easily mistaken for a "period drama" film set, Weatheroak Hall is a truly magnificent venue.

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YOUR WEDDING DAY YOUR WAY

We can host everything from "small and intimate" to "large and lavish" weddings, with rooms, packages and menus to suit all sizes and pockets.

Licensed for civil ceremonies we can provide a full wedding package or if marrying elsewhere a wedding breakfast and/or evening reception.

Our fabulous menus are delivered by chefs who have served in Michelin restaurants and we can tailor food and drink packages to suit your plans and budgets, guaranteeing prices for two years.

VISIT US

Graceful and sophisticated, Weatheroak Hall provides you with all the elegance and charm you would expect for your special day.

With our experienced team alongside you, from your very first visit when you step through the grand entrance and into the wood panelled galleried hallway, right up to your very last dance in our fabulous ballroom, you will be supported and guided every step of the way.

Together we will make your dreams real and your memories last a lifetime.

Illuminated at night: The picturesque front of Weatheroak Hall.

Romantic gardens: Take a stroll around the beautiful grounds.

The most important walk: The beautiful, airy ceremony room.

GET IN TOUCH

We would love to meet you, hear about your plans and share the wonder of Weatheroak Hall with you.
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"Our Wedding Co-ordinator is such a lovely person; she ran our wedding day and honestly it couldn't have gone any smoother. I didn't need to worry about anything, it was all in hand."

Where to start?

PLANNING a wedding . . . where to start? On your doorstep, as it turns out! Whether your style is a Village Hall DIY wedding, or a glamorous country manor, you'll find plenty of options where you live.

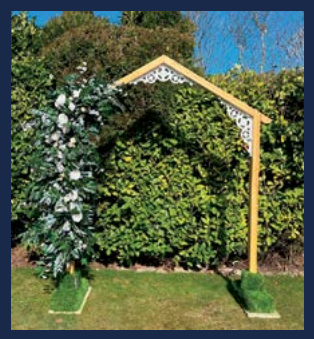
The 'to-do' list is seemingly endless, and you'll find some wonderful suppliers on the pages of *The Village*, but there are many more out there.

Many people choose to get married further afield (we can't blame you for eloping somewhere warm!), like the Cotswolds, or Hereford, but our question is . . . why go that far, when there are beautiful and affordable suppliers in Worcestershire?

When it comes to seamstresses, hairdressers, makeup and beauticians it's even better to stay local, so every trial run or prep in the run-up to the big day is just a few minutes away.

Images courtesey of Brockencote Hall

Beauty at Brockencote Hall: Stunning locations for cherished photos.



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The house, with its beautiful open grounds and French inspired architecture, that features our lovingly restored dovecote, makes it the perfect backdrop for your dream day. As you arrive at Brockencote up the sweeping driveway, you will see it's elegance, particularly in our grand entrance hall and panelled library. Walking through you find your way to Le Colonial Bar and sun-kissed back terrace to embrace all we have to offer amongst 70 acres of land and a secret garden.

We pride ourselves on our award-winning venue and design the day with you completely in mind with bespoke menus from canapés to dessert. Each wedding here is unique and intertwines what is authentic about each couple from the aesthetics, the flavours, and the feel of the day, with our dedicated team assisting every step of the way so you can relax and take in every moment surrounded by those you love.

We believe 'the difference is in the detail' and this is what sets us apart.

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Meet the Team

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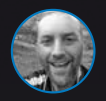
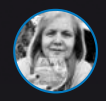
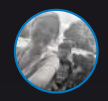


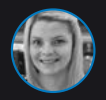
Martin Pryor
Financial Planner & Adviser
Business & Finance degree to Graduate training course at Prudential, leading to becoming a qualified independent financial adviser in 1996 and setting up PPM Financial Planning in 2006.



Nicky Lowndes
General Manager
Nicky has been at PPM Financial Planning since the very beginning in 2006 bringing with her 19 years of banking experience with HSBC.

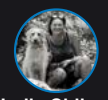


Laura Siddall
Financial Planner & Adviser
Laura has 19 years of industry experience. Her role is to construct financial plans for clients using our cash flow modelling software, helping deliver true financial planning.



Laura Daniels
Mortgage Adviser
Laura joined in 2016, providing admin support whilst completing training to become our qualified mortgage broker.

Louise Wheeler
Paraplanner
Louise Joined PPM in September 2021, bringing with her 8 years of paraplanning experience and 13 years working within financial services.



Jodie Chilcott
Office Administrator
Jodie joined PPM from an accountancy background and performs a variety of tasks in the day to day running of the business.

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LIVE LIFE BY DESIGN

WHEN you think of how financial advice helps you, it's likely that you think of it from a financial perspective first. Perhaps how it can help you to invest to get the most out of our savings or making sure you're on track for retirement?

Financial Planning can help in these areas, but it goes far beyond that too. It can help you live the life that you want, feel more confident about the future, and give you chance to think about your goals.

When clients first approach a finance professional, it's often because they have a specific question or concern like:

- How can I invest and minimise tax?
- What annual income will my pension provide?
- Can I reduce the impact of inheritance tax?

While we can help you answer questions like those above, the process of financial planning is designed to deliver greater value.

Financial planning starts with understanding your current situation and what you want to achieve in the short term and long term. Through defining these goals, you can start to understand how your finances and the steps you take can help you to meet aspirations.

It can answer initial questions but the value it delivers extends further. You may approach a financial planner asking: "Am I saving enough to retire at 65?"

You may be expecting a simple "yes" or "no" answer, but financial planning will ask other questions, too. For example:

- Would you like to retire sooner if that were an option?
- What kind of retirement lifestyle do you want?
- What lifestyle experiences are on your bucket list?

As a result, the advice you receive can exceed the reason you first approached a professional for financial advice.

So how does this add value? The

In part one of two, **Martin Pryor** tells us why financial planning is important for your lifestyle.

answer can be split into two areas: Your finances and Your lifestyle.

This article will focus on the Lifestyle benefits and then next month we will explain the financial benefits.

Financial planners don't just offer you advice about a single area of finances. Instead, they take the time to understand what you want to achieve, what your priorities are and how your existing assets or income can help you to meet these goals.

It's a process that can help to give you some direction and realise dreams you may have previously thought were out of reach.

You might be diligently saving into a pension, for instance. But when do you want to retire and what kind of lifestyle do you want to enjoy after giving up work? Often while paying into a pension we have a vague idea about when we'd like to retire and some of the things we hope to experience in retirement, such as a once-in-a-lifetime holiday. However, financial planning can help focus these goals and give you a chance to think and talk about what you really want.

- What does your day-to -day ideal retirement lifestyle look like?
- If financially feasible, when would you choose to retire?
- What are your other goals on retirement, for example, providing financial support to loved ones?

By giving you an opportunity to set out long-term goals, financial planners can add more value to the service they deliver. If you found you have enough to retire now, but take a slightly lower income that would still allow you to meet lifestyle goals, would you take it?

Financial planning allows you to take a hands-off approach. The focus is the long term and the process can help you to get more out of your assets with your aspirations in mind. With regular reviews and updates you will know your financial plans are on track.

As a result, financial advice can improve your wellbeing and give you the time to focus on the areas of your life that are a priority.

Having confidence in the financial steps you're taking is essential for getting the most out of your assets. With so many different options and other factors to consider, you may be unsure about what options make sense with your goals in mind.

A range of tools can help you to understand how the decisions you make today will have an impact on your financial goals. It's a step that can help to put your current options into perspective and deliver peace of mind.

Finally, while we often think of accumulating wealth when seeking financial advice, one of the hardest things to do can be to start spending the assets you have built up. After a lifetime of saving, it can be difficult to change your mindset and start to deplete assets in retirement, for example. Financial planning can provide the confidence you need to enjoy retirement, safe in the knowledge that you're still financially secure and able to meet other commitments.

Financial planning helps people to live life by design rather than default.

Martin Pryor
Lifestyle Financial Planner

For more information, please contact us

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Woodland warriors

PEPPER WOOD, which can be found just the other side of Fairfield, is an ancient and hugely valuable community woodland, a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and has an exceptional diversity of trees and shrubs as well as a number of rare and uncommon flowering plants.

Thanks to the support of the community and successful fundraising, Pepper Wood has recently been extended and work has begun to transform it into a new haven for wildlife. Through a combination of natural regeneration and carefully thought-out tree planting this land will establish a new landscape creating 250 acres of continuous, resilient native woodland.

To help with this ambitious target, the Woodland Trust held several planting days in December and invited a range of volunteers to plant new native trees. The planting team included volunteers from the local community and staff from Lloyds Bank who partner with the Woodland Trust.

There was also an enthusiastic team of children from Fairfield First School who between them managed to plant 100 trees. Headmaster Scott Smith felt it was a great experience for the children saying: "It was a wonderful experience for our children to be involved in. Pepper Wood is an area that we use, as a learning resource, regularly throughout the year, so is well loved by our children and their families.

Preserving the woods: A valuable learning resource.

100 trees: Students spent the day planting trees.

"We were delighted to be able to help with such an ambitious project that will change our local environment forever. We look forward to continuing our visits and watching the area develop."

The site manager for Pepper Wood, Paul Jarczewski, knows that the Woodland Trust has big plans for the site and in the coming years hopes to create new habitats, increase the bio-diversity and give the community a valuable area of green space. He said: "With the help of local people we have kick-started the creation of our new native wood next to Pepper Wood. During this planting event we managed to plant 2,500 trees. We hope as the wood develops it will eventually become as interesting and diverse as Pepper Wood itself, and make a lasting contribution in our fight against climate change and nature loss."

The Woodland Trust is the largest woodland conservation charity in the UK. It wants to see a UK rich in native woods and trees for people and wildlife.

The Trust has three key aims:
• protect ancient woodland which is rare, unique and irreplaceable
• restoration of damaged ancient woodland, bringing precious pieces of our natural history back to life
• plant native trees and woods with the aim of creating resilient landscapes for people and wildlife.

The Woodland Trust now has more than 1,000 sites in its care covering approximately 29,000 hectares. Access to its woods is free so everyone can benefit from woods and trees.

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RED SKY AT NIGHT

Amateur astronomer **Brian Watkiss** peers into the *Village* night sky.

AS we start to head towards winter's end, the Sun begins to set noticeably later and rise a little earlier each day, bringing a bit more brightness to the world.

In our evening skies we still have that bright planet Jupiter over in the west. If you start looking as soon as the skies darken, there above the glow of the sunset is the largest planet in our Solar System.

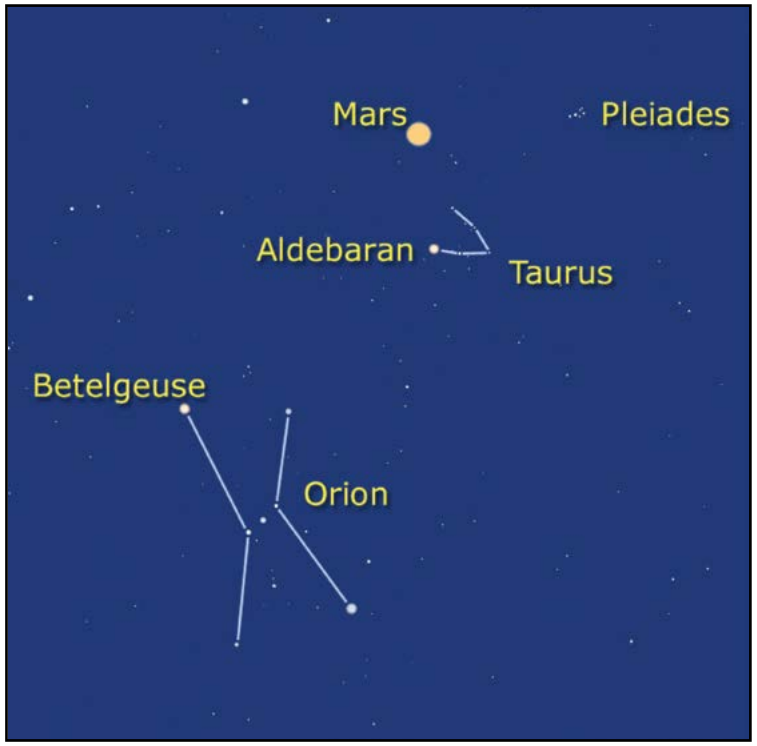
If you have a really good view of the horizon, you may notice a challenger though.

This is the beautiful planet Venus, preparing to usurp the "Bringer of Joy" as the brightest object in the sky. With Saturn now too close to the Sun to be seen, we can watch the "Bringer of Peace" get a little higher each day as it catches up with the Earth in its quicker orbit. In fact, Venus takes just 224 days to circle the Sun which means we meet up every year and a half. It never rises very far above the sunset though, so you only have an hour or so to catch it but do look out for it, especially during the last week of the month as Jupiter descends westwards towards Venus.

On the 22nd, for example, a thin crescent Moon appears between the pair, always a beautiful sight, and then the two get even closer day by day, almost colliding at the beginning of March.

Moving left and higher in our skies, over to the southeast, we can see a plethora of red objects.

By far the largest is the well known Betelgeuse, at the top left hand corner of the large constellation of Orion, The Hunter. This star is a huge red giant which recently dimmed down but is now back to its normal brightness. It is thought that it released an enormous cloud of gas and dust which blocked some of its light.



A red sky above: Made up of Mars, Orion and Taurus.
Pictures courtesy of NASA.

Above Orion and to the right is Taurus, The Bull, with another red giant, Aldebaran, appearing like a big red eye in the "vee" of stars making up this constellation.

By far the reddest and most obvious object is the planet Mars, the only other bright planet visible at the moment and it's in our skies all night, sitting between Taurus and The Pleiades.

It is astonishingly bright, given its size and distance. If you imagine Earth being the size of a football and you placed it in The Square in Alvechurch, then Mars would be a ball roughly half that size sitting on platform one of Barnt Green station – behind the yellow line of course!

Despite this distance, NASA has sent a rover to the Red Planet which is traversing the surface and it is using a helicopter "scout" to help it choose the best route as it goes. *Perserverance*, as the rover is named, together with its glamorous assistant, *Ingenuity*, has recently started creating a cache of rock samples which is to be collected and returned to Earth sometime in the future.

***Perseverance* delivers:** Rock samples taken on Mars.

On that note, I won't mention what Mars brings, I'll just wish you peace and joy until next time.

Winter Oaks: Standing proud in Withybed Green.

ALL AROUND US

Mary Green takes a walk through Alvechurch and shares her 'ordinary' discoveries.

AFTER the brief but intense cold spell in early December, the mild winter came back and with it all the young greenery along the paths and roads and remarkably spring-like birdsong. The little blackthorn bush near me which flowers magically in winter had one flower at Advent, nothing in the cold spell, and then was covered in little stars again by Christmas day. I don't know of another blackthorn like this anywhere. It is rooted with a cherry-plum and may have hybridised, but it flowers even earlier than any cherry-plum. There were winter holly flowers as well this year (it usually flowers in May) but this is more widespread on cut holly in a mild year.

On my walks, whether with others or alone, I often cover the same ground over and over. Each time there is something different to see. I remember during lockdown people saying they got tired of doing the same walks, but to me there's always something to

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find. This year I thought I would take you on some of my walks in these articles, talking about some of the things you might see and hear. The recent biodiversity summit repeated that Britain is in the worst 10 per cent of countries for loss of biodiversity. Any little thing we can do to improve that helps – and it starts with noticing what's around you.

I'll start with something very ordinary – my walk from Withybed Green down into the village of Alvechurch. The start is surrounded by trees, most of the bigger ones ash or oak. In particular there are three big oaks in a row in a field, and a wood at the top of the hill with oaks, ash, maple, sycamore, smaller flowering wild cherries and apple in spring, and understory of hawthorn, blackthorn and holly. This wood surrounds the old brickworks quarry and has some unusual field maples that turn red in autumn instead of yellow. The hamlet of Withybed is also full of fruit trees: apple, plum and especially damson, including ancient varieties of each.

Because of this tree abundance, the area is full of small birds of all kinds. Every garden has a robin of course, along with great tits (singing now), bluetits, coaltits, dunnocks, chaffinches and many others. In recent years we have had huge numbers of jackdaws which seem to be discouraging some of the smaller birds and living in our chimneys (and owl

A winter robin: perched on a garden hedge.

Field maple: On the corner of Snake Lane and The Gaunts, Alvechurch.

A grazing woodpigeon: Eating ivy berries.

Damson blossom: Flowering in Withybed.

boxes!) Other common large birds are magpies (one nesting in my ash tree) and woodpigeons. These bigger birds call even in winter when the small birds are quieter.

If you look at the ground plants, they show that this area had remnants of ancient woodland, some surviving in the hedges. Dog's mercury comes from January, then ground ivy followed by yellow archangel.

Some of the domestic hedges are cut back so neatly they don't flower and fruit so don't host other wildlife much. But even these are often covered with ivy, which flowers in September and sets fruit later, providing nectar for insects and berries for birds late in the season. It's not a thriving hedge if the ivy can take over like this, but at least the ivy provides some compensation.

As I walk down past the canal and railway, there are yet more trees, including some big old ashes and a beautiful wild cherry which fruits well. The birds are even more noticeable here especially in spring. I often hear chaffinches and greenfinches for the first time here in February and March. Even in winter I see dunnocks and wrens scouring the paths for food and skimming back along the hedges. I know there are mammals around too – hedgehogs, badgers, foxes, rabbits, field mice, deer – but don't usually see these in daylight walks – perhaps the odd grey squirrel. If it has snowed though I see their tracks. The first time I saw deer tracks in my garden took me by surprise!

Once I've turned down past the railway, the gardens of Alvechurch proper begin and there is less wild

A weakened hedge: Covered in ivy.

Small and white: Christmas flowering blackthorn.

vegetation or trees. But the banks alongside the road are fascinating in their way. There's one long bank which is full of wildflowers. It is regularly mowed so you need to walk this route frequently to catch them. Even in winter I saw flowers out: daisy, dandelion, cat's ear, yarrow, sowthistle, chickweed, groundsel, buttercup, white dead-nettle. In spring it will be full of celandines, garlic-mustard and cow parsley and then in May in one spot is some pignut, the marker of ancient pasture, which has somehow survived here. Many of these plants like goosegrass and chickweed are edible and were used to feed poultry in the past. Most of the "grassy banks" are not actually grass!

In the more lawn-like banks on the slopes of Withybed Lane are more remnants of old pasture when they're not mown. Good Friday Grass appears in spring, and many have clover, self-heal, yarrow and even moon daisies. There are a few good trees too, especially some birches.

The change in dominant birds fascinates me as I approach the village. The jackdaws persist for a while then give way to sparrows, chattering incessantly among the houses. Then starlings take over, wheezing and whistling on the chimney tops. Some birds have made a speciality of living among houses for part of their life-cycle, and sparrows and starlings are among

Lady's bedstraw: Found on the roadsides around Alvechurch.

them. It's hard to believe but starlings are now on the red list – endangered through lack of habitat. Swifts, too, come here in the summer – none of these are so common just up the road in the more rural Withybed.

The walk takes me briefly along Snake Lane before turning down The Gaunts and Bear Hill Drive into the village, where we are once again into houses and bungalows with front gardens. Here, too, the grass areas are fascinating. Most have Good Friday grass and other more common species like clover, cats' ear, daisy and self-heal. But some have other real old meadow flowers. One pristine lawn if allowed to grow has lots of lady's bedstraw, a beautiful feathery sweet-scented plant that was once

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Winter yarrow: Occasionally found when lawns are not mown.

Old pasture flowers: found around Alvechurch.

A feathered friend: Perched in ornamental crab apples.

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used to perfume bedding. It also has knapweed, the tall purple plant we see in old hayfields, and birds foot trefoil. These are the same grassy spaces that had wonderful fungi last autumn. You could see by how they came up that underground fibres ran right across the area linking all the houses together!

This intrigued me because somehow the old meadow or pasture land here which was built on in the twentieth century has survived the stress of builders and landscapers with the old roots and fungi underground intact.

They are mown many times now during the growing period – far too often for me – but still when left alone they come back up. Two of our local district councillors are trying to persuade the relevant bodies not to mow our grassy spaces so often. With a bit of care, we could have far more flowering – and save on fuel. Then they would host more insects and birds. It's a real step we could make to improve biodiversity.

The regenerative properties of these green spaces are a powerful message for a new year, to go with wassailing the apple trees which we are doing now. And talking of apple trees… The interest doesn't stop when we get nearer the village. Here there are some ornamental crab apple trees, a garden variety, but not too different from our native crab. They have copious blossom in spring and are covered with tiny golden apples in the autumn and often into the winter, feeding first insects and then birds.

Then near the back of the car park is where I found that our common hawthorn is supplemented sometimes by an older species, midland or woodland hawthorn. These are usually remnants of ancient woodland, whereas the common hawthorn was mostly planted later for hedging.

Alvechurch village is full of trees wherever you look. I pass a lovely big field maple on the corner of The Gaunts and can see the big redwoods rising above the oak and ash. We are lucky that most people over the years have kept the trees when the houses were built.

As you can see, at all seasons there is something to notice on this short walk. This month I will be looking for early celandines, and hearing the first chaffinch songs of the spring. On my way back, I'll detour into the churchyard and see cherry plum blossom out, the first fragile blossoms of spring, feeding early insects, and the snowdrops surviving whatever the weather. See you there!

■ At my age, having my first hearing aids is a big event, and I wrote this poem (right) about it.

Listen

Listen
Your shoes crunch boldly on the road
Your breath echoes in your nose, and the wind
Sighs gently against your hair -
The everyday miracle of walking

Listen
Jackdaws brawl and squabble like children
Then sparrows, chuntering and busy
Starlings whoop and whistle on chimneys -
The wonder of everyday bird song

Listen
Voices are singing, high, deep, warm
Guitars weave and wrap and chime your heart
Violins fly and polish the sky -
The forgotten resonances of music

Listen
The floorboards creak below like ancient knees
Peeing sounds loud as Niagara
Who knew that time ticked by so loudly? –
The comedy of workaday sounds

Listen
This is a room full of people
Everyone has a voice and you can hear it
Everyone has a wonder if you can find it
Everyone mixes the sound of humanity –
The miracles of poetry and science.

The anonymous birder

How to enjoy village birdlife

We need to make a list

THE annual RSPB Big Garden Birdwatch is the largest citizen science survey in the world, with around 700,000 participants last year.

If you've not joined in, it involves the wonderfully calming task of just sitting for an hour at home or in your local park, observing and making a list.

It is taking place from January 27-29, as this magazine is dropping through letter boxes, so you may just have time to join in. If not, birders love listing and there are many other lists to be compiling to add interest to the hobby.

The big list is a "life list": all the birds you've ever seen. When you start doing this or when you first get into birding, the list is ever expanding, particularly when trips to reserves or abroad see new species being added apace.

There comes a time, however, when this grinds to a halt when each addition is like panning a gold nugget. No matter, you could also run a "year list". Birders are often out on New Year's Day getting a good head start to their year list and the most serious listers will compete like ornithological gladiators to gain the most species in a calendar year, with often controversial and acrimonious results.

The 2011 film *The Big Year*, starring Steve Martin, Jack Black and Owen Wilson, takes a comic look at the North American version of obsessed listing and settling down to watch this movie is a nice way to spend a wet winter's afternoon.

If those lists seem a bit unwieldy, there are other options. Your "patch list", or what you see in your local area, can bring a rewarding and informative facet to your birdwatching.

Once you've got all your regular birds it's just a case of adding new visitors. Even the most routine trudge can throw up unexpected delights.

A museum of waxwings, as photographed by Graham Wilkes in Lickey End, Bromsgrove, during a big freeze in northern Europe in 2017.

This winter I've had fantastic views of a kingfisher leap-frogging ahead on the canals, a little grebe has decided to spend the winter on the local park lake and grey wagtails are also wintering in the park.

It's also interesting to keep an eye on your regular customers and the patterns of their abundance that emerge over the years. If you want to take your recording a bit more seriously and contribute to bird science, the British Trust for Ornithology (BTO) website explains how you can get involved.

Along with the patch list, my other favourite is the "garden list", which records anything that flies into, over or is heard in the garden. If you can't or find it difficult to get out and about, this is the list for you and, yes, confidently identifying a bird through sound qualifies it for any of the other lists (more on this next month).

You'll be surprised what will appear when you start looking and listening, whether it's a migrant which, after travelling thousands of miles, decides your garden looks like a nice spot for a break. Or the couple of mallards who gave my freshly dug 5x3' lockdown pond their blessing for an hour.

If you only do one list this year, and you're in time, make it the Big Garden Birdwatch and don't worry if not very much appears as it is just as useful from a data point of view. It also includes mammals so if you see a muntjac deer chasing a hedgehog on a fox's back, then do send in your record. If not, just enjoy a mindful hour.

Also, worth noting: in certain rare years, a poor winter crop of berries in Scandinavia and Russia forces birds to travel abroad for food. This year appears to be one of those. In birding circles it is known as a Waxwing Winter and may only occur once a decade.

Waxwings are striking berry eating machines and are very exotic looking birds. Flocks will often be seen in supermarket car parks stripping ornamental berry trees oblivious to the hustle and bustle around them.

Come to think of it, the last time I saw waxwings was on the way to the shops. Another time I asked my wife to drive round a roundabout twice, to check a sighting in an adjacent rowan tree.

A waxwing is a very coveted tick for any birdwatcher – but only if you keep a list. **JL**

MIXED START TO YEAR

Alvechurch amateur weatherman **Phil Thomas** records the changes.

THERE was a cold start to December, with below average temperatures and frosty conditions. Two "ice days" were recorded, so named because the air temperature doesn't climb above freezing point, which is rare for the areas. These were recorded on 12 December where there was a maximum temperature of -0.2C and on the 13th, with a maximum temperature of -0.5C.

The coldest screen minimum of 2022 was recorded on the 15 December, at -7.6C.

Moving into January (up to the 10th), it has so far been a very mild start to the New Year, with a mean temperature of 7.8C, which is a lot higher than would be expected for this time of year, 3.5C above the local value. Both wet and windy however, a gust of 40mph was recorded on 7 January, and there were spells of heavy rain in the early parts of the month.

Overall, 2022 had the highest mean temperature for Central England since records begun. There has been a steady rise in temperature over the last 40 years. . . so who knows what 2023 will bring, especially if we remember the heatwave of summer 2022.

The Outlook

As we progress further into January, the latter part of the month is likely to bring more settled conditions, with more prolonged, drier interludes for most areas, increasing the incidence of overnight frost, morning fog and perhaps lower daytime temperatures too.

Showers or longer spells of rain are also a possibility, however these are likely to be mainly confined to the west or northwest of the country.

Above: A frosty sunrise over Newbourne Hill, Rowney Green.
Below: Icy start to the day.

Towards the end of the period, a return to generally milder and unsettled conditions is the most likely outcome, with spells of wet and windy weather sweeping through, probably across all areas with only brief dry interludes. However, with the shortest day of the year behind us, spring is afoot.

December 2022

Mean Max	6.5C	1.0C below average
Mean Min	0.8C	1.0C below average
Mean	3.6C	1.0C below average
Rainfall	60.9mm	74% of average
Sunshine	61.1hrs	103% of average

January 2023 (to the 10th)

Mean Max	10.9C	3.9C above average
Mean Min	4.8C	3.1C above average
Mean	7.8C	3.5C above average
Rainfall	24.7mm	33% of average
Sunshine	11.4hrs	19% of average

The Year (2022)

Mean Max	15.2C	1.1C above average
Mean Min	6.9C	0.7C above average
Mean	11.1C	0.9C above average
Rainfall	750.6mm	89% of average
Sunshine	1388.5hrs	99% of average

More information at ***www.alvechurchweather.metsite.com*** You can see an improved HD weather-cam, updated at one-minute intervals, at: ***www.alvechurchweather.metsite.com/webcam_alvechurch.php***

EVENTS

THE MIDLAND SINFONIA will hold their General knowledge quiz and supper evening on 11 February at 7.30pm the Ark Alvechurch B48 7SB. £12pp to include fish/spring roll and chips - booking essential for catering. Door and bar open at 7pm To book: www.midland-sinfonia.co.uk email: midlandsinfonia@gmail.com or text/tel 07889 147861. On 18 March, they will also hold their Young Musicians' Showcase at 3pm and a concert at 7.30pm on the 25 March.

BEOLEY VILLAGE HALL hosts live music, comedy and jazz nights. The next event will be "Village Cinema - Fisherman's Friends" on Friday 3 February, and "Black Country Comedy & Music with Doug Parker" on Saturday 25 March. For Friday night events, the bar opens at 7pm with entertainment from 7.30pm, and on Saturdays the bar opens at 7.15pm with entertainment from 8pm.
Jazz nights occur on the 4th Wednesday of the month, upcoming events include "Hot Fingers ("Spats" Langham)" on Wednesday 22 February and "The Lonnie Donegan Story with Warren James, Alex Clarke, Jim Swinnerton and 'Baby Jools'" on 22 March. On Wednesday Jazz nights the bar opens at 7.45pm, with entertainment from 8.15pm.

THE COUNCIL OF CHRISTIANS & JEWS (Birmingham branch) invite you to join them to watch "J'Accuse", a documentary about the Nazi massacre of Lithuanian Jews and the subsequent fight against Holocaust denial. The documentary will be shown at 7pm on 7 February, at Barnt Green Quaker Meeting House, 6 Sandhills Road, B45 8NR. Admission is free.

BARNT GREEN CHORAL SOCIETY perform Brahms "Requiem" at 3.pm on Saturday 25 March at North Bromsgrove High School.

A WONDERFUL NIGHT OF MUSIC, featuring vocalists Mitch Miller and Chloe Barry, will be held on 4 March at Alvechurch Village Hall at 8pm. Tickets cost £12 (plus booking fee) and can be bought from www.eventbrite.co.uk, search "A-wonderful night of music".

MUSIC

ALVECHURCH COMMUNITY CHOIR usually meets in Alvechurch Village Hall on Mondays at 7.30pm with occasional pub and outdoor sessions and a live stream. The choir is inclusive and open to everyone, whether you think you can sing or not. For more information or to join or book us, see our website www.alvechurchcommunitychoir.org.uk. We'll be singing at the Wassail on 4 February and will be at The Crown, Withybed Green, on 13 February.

THE ASKLEPIOS ORCHESTRA
Save the date of the Spring Concert, which will be on 2 April 2023.

BEL CANTO SINGERS, the well-known 4-part Worcestershire choir, are back to rehearsals at St. John's Church, Greenlands Avenue Redditch B98 7PZ on Monday evenings. They are always happy to welcome new singers. They have a very wide and varied repertoire and a huge catalogue to include pop, fun pieces, musical theatre, jazz, folk music and traditional choral and classical music along with much more. Bel Canto Singers are a friendly and social group, under the guidance of Musical Director, Liz Green and accompanist, Wendy Quirk. They are a non-profit making organisation and select a new charity each year to support both financially and with provision of their services. Just turn up at rehearsal on Mondays at 7.30pm where there will be a wide range of singing activities, light refreshments and chat. More information please contact Secretary Veronica Porter 07885 507899 or visit www.belcantosingers.org.uk

THE GEMINI Choir is seeking new singers. Info from Philip Morris on 07969 741137.

BLACKWELL Concert Band and Training Band is open to all brass and woodwind players of all abilities. To learn more about the band, book them, or find details of upcoming events, email blackwellconcertband98@gmail.com or visit www.blackwellconcertband.co.uk

SINGING For Health is an online group aimed specifically at people with health problems, mental or physical. It's fortnightly and completely free – all you need is a printer and a suitable device (laptop, phone etc).

BROMSGROVE Music Centre runs weekly sessions for young brass, wind, and string instrument players to enjoy being part of a group who rehearse and perform together. New members always welcome! Sessions are run by Severn Arts at St John's Middle School, Bromsgrove, on Mondays 5.45–6.45pm. Individual instrumental and vocal lessons are also provided at the centre. For more info, see www.severnarts.org.uk/music-centre-groups

BROMSGROVE Folk Club meets on the second and last Thurs every month at Catshill Club, starting at 8pm. For a full list of events call Bob Bignell on 0121 476 5938 or see www.bromsgrovefolkclub.co.uk

BROMSGROVE Rock Choir offers everyone the chance to sing pop, rock and chart songs – no audition needed. Free taster sessions available. More info at www.rockchoir.com or on 01252 714276.

BROMSGROVE Community Choir meets on Thurs evenings, 6–7 pm at Bromsgrove Methodist Church (main church hall). They sing for fun and enjoyment; everyone welcome, singers or not. Contact Ruth Henley for details on 01527 527022 or 07812 145267, or email r.g.henley@btinternet.com

DANCING

TANGO ARGENTINO at Barnt Green Quakers/Friends Meeting House on Saturday mornings and Thursday evenings. For further information: www.facebook.com/groups/tango42/announcements (no Facebook account needed).

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WHAT'S ON GUIDE

LET THE BELLS RING

The ringers at St Laurence Church in Alvechurch are starting their 2023 recruitment campaign with an Open Afternoon on Saturday 25 February from 2 until 4pm. Sessions start with a short introduction in the Ark followed by an opportunity to try ringing a bell in the tower. Talk to any of the ringers or email_alvechurchbells@yahoo.co.uk_ to book a session.

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AELFGYTHE Border Morris is seeking new dancers (female) and musicians (male or female) to join them for fun, exercise and dancing. They meet at 7.45pm every Weds in Alvechurch Baptist Church Hall. Everyone welcome. Come and play traditional folk music, or try Morris dancing. For more details call Pam on 07961 830 831.

FRENCH & Breton folk dancing meets at Alvechurch Village Hall on the first Sat each month from 2.30–5pm (Covid-dependent, so please check first by emailing alvechurch-frenchdance@gmail.com). Informal tuition and live music provided. New dancers (and musicians) welcome. £2 per session.

SEQUENCE Ballroom and Latin dancing every Mon evening at 8pm at the Longbridge Social Club, 1012 Bristol Road South, Northfield. Occasional free tuition. All welcome to a friendly fun-filled dance. Details from Kalvin on 07725 265024.

ALVECHURCH Morris Men are on the lookout for new dancers and musicians. They practise on Mondays at Alvechurch Baptist Church Hall, 8.30–10pm, followed by a "debrief" at a local hostelry.
They dance in local towns and at various local and national events, and perform a world-famous (sort of) mummers play in the village every New Year's Day.
No ability, fitness or co-ordination required – if you are male, 18+ and prepared to spend more time than is probably good for you in public houses, pop along to meet the group! Drop in to any practice, contact Steve on 07375 592928 or email: alvechurchbagman@gmail.com

NANCY Butterfly Morris Dancers dance in the North-West Morris style (clogs!) and practise at Catshill Methodist Church Hall on Monday evenings ready to meet up with other Morris sides for social events and festivals. They are very happy to welcome new adult dancers and musicians. See: www.nancybutterfly.co.uk or Facebook for what they get up to. You can contact them via the website or Jane on 07726 915289.

AVONCROFT Folk Dance Group enjoys anything from barn dances to ones seen in *Pride & Prejudice* or *Poldark*. All welcome, no need to have a partner. The group meets every Thurs from 8–10pm at Avoncroft Arts Centre, Redditch Road, Bromsgrove B60 4JR. £2.50 incl refreshments. Info from Liz Stanton on 01905 353995 or liz@the-stantons.uk or visit www.avoncroftfdg.weebly.com

BJ's BUSY Boots Line Dancing Classes: Tues 2–3pm Bromsgrove Leisure Centre; 7–10pm Stoke Prior Sports/Country Club. Thurs 1.15–3.30pm Bromsgrove Methodist Church Centre. Social Dance usually 1st Sat in month at All Saints Church Hall, Burcot Lane. It's a fun way to exercise. For more details phone Brenda on 01527 870151.

AMY GREAVES SCHOOL OF DANCE & Fitness offers a variety of classes for toddler up to adults. Based in Hopwood, Bournville and Longbridge. Contact 07979408997 amygreaves1@hotmail.co.uk www.amygreavesschoolofdance.com

SEQUENCE dancing every Tuesday evening at 8pm at Fairfield Village Hall, Bromsgrove. Welcoming and friendly atmosphere, all levels welcome. For further details please contact Joyce & Len on 0121 682 3266.

CLUBS, GROUPS & SOCIETIES

ST GODWALD'S Community Cafe meets every other Fri from 10am–noon at St Godwald's Room adjacent to the Church Hall, Finstall Road, Bromsgrove. Extra safety measures are in place. Friendship, cake, tea/coffee. Donations welcome— monies to St Basil's charity for homeless youngsters. More info: davidrowe876@btinternet.com

BROMSGROVE Men In Sheds is a group for anyone (male or female) who has retired or been made redundant and wants to spend time with like-minded people. The group meets Mon–Thurs, 10am–2pm at Unit 1, Metals & Ores Industrial Estate, Stoke Prior B60 4JZ. You can find more information by calling 01527 570490 or email enquiries@ageukbrwf.org.uk

BARNT GREEN QUAKERS warmly invite everyone to the Friends Meeting House in Sandhills Road. Parking is available on site, and there is access for the disabled. We hope that this winter, rather than remaining isolated at home, you will visit us to meet old and new friends for a chat and a (free!) cup of tea or coffee. It does us all good just to get out of our homes for a short time now and then. COVID has meant that creating friendships and making social contacts has become more important to all of us, and the Meeting House is a pleasant, quiet and comfortable place where you can meet other people.

PLACES OF WELCOME is a growing network of local community groups who provide their neighbourhoods with places where all people can feel safe and where they can connect, belong and contribute. You can now find one of these hubs in Alvechurch. The network is open in St Laurence Church and The Ark on Wednesdays 10.30am-12pm, however you may find these in many different places such as community centres or libraries, and all are open to everyone and offer friendship and hospitality, free refreshments and local knowledge about the neighbourhood.
Visit www.placesofwelcome.org.uk or email info@placesofwelcome.org.uk

REDDITCH Military History Society usually meets monthly in St Luke's Church Hall (Evesham Road, Redditch, B97 4JX), 7 for 7.30pm. More info from Ron on 01527 545450 or ronnieg33b@hotmail.co.uk

FRIENDS Of Bittell Reservoirs is a group of local people interested in preserving the natural environment of the Site of Special Scientific Interest at Upper Bittell, Lower Bittell and Mill Shrub reservoirs, which are important staging posts for migrant birds and wildlife. If you have an interest in preserving this unique environment and would like to help in its preservation and maintenance, contact: Charles Deverill on cdjd26@gmail.com

ALVECHURCH VILLAGE SOCIETY runs a regular programme of social events and guided walks, as well as maintaining local footpaths. Talks and social events are held in the Village Hall. Entry is £1 for members and £2 for guests, including a drink and biscuit. The next event, "Our Local Canal History" - a talk by Denis Pike, will be held on Wednesday 15 February at 7.30pm.
The Annual General Meeting will be held on Wednesday 22 March at 7.30pm. The AGM is open to all, and AVS members are encouraged to attend.
For more and full details, visit www.alvechurchvs.org or contact Chairperson Chris Miall via R.C.Miall@bham.ac.uk
AVS is always pleased to welcome new members—contact Martin on 07742 100007 or martinclarke1@btinternet.com

REDDITCH Community Shed is a project that encourages skills, combats loneliness, and provides a sense of worth in people who are retired or otherwise wondering what to do with themselves. They have a small woodworking work shop in the Kingfisher Centre just outside Primark and they are open Tuesday and Thursday mornings. Call in for tea and biscuits and a look round. More details at www.RedditchCommunityShed.co.uk or on FaceBook. If you're in Redditch of a Tuesday or Thursday they would be very pleased to see you.

THE MONDAY Fellowship group meets at the Parish Centre behind St Andrew's Church in Barnt Green at 2.30pm on the second Monday every month; £2 to include tea and biscuits and an interesting talk. Info: Maureen Frowley on 0121 445 0880.

INNER WHEEL Club of Redditch welcomes you to its monthly meetings on 2nd Tuesday of the month at the Southcrest Hotel Redditch. An international Women's Organisation, they enjoy a bit of everything; walks, talks, days & evenings out, and everything in between whilst at the same time helping the community. Contact Anne Robertson for information 07580351361. Or email redditch.innerwheel@gmail.com or visit www.innerwheel.co.uk

BROMSGROVE U3A: No longer in full time work? Activity/interest groups and speaker meetings are happening throughout the month. Check website for details: www.u3asites.org.uk/bromsgrove/home

BROMSGROVE & Redditch Welcomes Refugees is a group of volunteers supporting local refugees who arrived under the government's Syrian Vulnerable Persons' Relocation Scheme (SVPRS). New volunteers always needed – training and support given. BRWR is open to all, irrespective of political or religious belief. Full details at www.brwr.uk

CATSHILL Carers and Bereavement Back Up Group is a group set up specifically to offer respite, socialising and occasional speakers to carers and bereaved in the area. It meets on the last Tues each month in the coffee bar area of Catshill Methodist Church Centre in Golden Cross Lane from 2.30pm for about 1.5hrs. All carers and bereaved welcome, as well as those who used to care for someone who has passed away or is now in a care facility. Tea and biscuits/cake provided – no charge. Contact Sheila (0121 445 2813) or Di (0121 445 3595) for details and encouragement.

BROMSGROVE Speakers Club meets at The Barn at The Bell at Belbroughton every other Tues, 7.45–10pm. Everyone who wants to gain confidence in public speaking is welcome, but you must book in advance via www.bromsgrovespeakers.org.uk, which also contains full details of events.

RE-ENGAGE (formerly Contact the Elderly) aims to help isolated elderly people by offering monthly tea parties where they can reconnect or make new friends in their own community. If you know of an elderly person who could benefit, please get in touch on 07539 276054. Guests need to be aged over 75 and living alone, and must be mobile enough to walk to a driver's car with assistance. Find general info at www.contact-the-elderly.org.uk and details of the local group @ContacttheElderlyRedditch on Facebook.

AGE UK Herefordshire and Worcestershire have a free Dementia Café at Finstall Village hall. It is a free social hub aimed at people with dementia, their families, and carers in Bromsgrove and the surrounding areas. It takes place every 2nd Wednesday of the month from 10.30am-12.30pm.

BROMSGROVE Photographic Society is a friendly, active and mutually supportive club for those keen to learn about, or improve, their photographic and digital imaging skills. The growing membership has skills ranging from novice to highly skilled, within wide-ranging subjects. The club meets on Tues nights, 8-10pm at Avoncroft Arts Centre. For more info, visit www.bromsgroveps.com or see Facebook and Twitter.

ROTARY Club of Bromsgrove meets every 2nd Tues of the month at Maekong Thai Restaurant, and every 4th Tues at Bromsgrove School, both 7pm for 7.30pm. New members welcome. For more info visit www.bromsgroverotary.org.uk or contact Ron Pearce on 07703 567982.

HEART Of England Speakers is a friendly public speaking club, based in Solihull. It is affiliated to Toastmasters International, and meets on the 1st and 3rd Tues of each month, 7.30—9.30pm, at the Silhillians Sports Club and Events Centre, as well as via Zoom. If you would like to boost your confidence get in touch via www.heartspeakers.org.uk, Instagram @toastmastersheartofengland, or via LinkedIn.

MIDLAND Ancestors have resumed monthly meetings at Bromsgrove Methodist Centre (19 Stratford Road, Bromsgrove, B60 1AS). More info at: www.bromsgrovebmsgh.co.uk

LICKEY Valley Trefoil Guild, as a branch of the Guide Association, is open to anyone over the age of 18. Make new friends, travel, explore, serve the community and help Guiding and Scouting in your area. The Guild meets at Barnt Green Scout & Guide Centre (off Blackwell Road, Barnt Green, B45 8BT) every second Weds from 2-4pm. For more info call 0121 445 3907 or 0121 445 2813 or visit www.trefoilguild.co.uk

REDDITCH Rotary Club meets Monday lunchtimes at the Abbey Hotel, Hither Green Lane, Redditch, B98 9BE. You would be very welcome to join in. Want to be involved, hear interesting speakers, and serve your community? Want to know more? Contact Peter Williams on 01527 60277.

LICKEY PHAB Club is a social club where people aged 14 and over, with and without disabilities, can come together each week to have fun! It is affiliated to national charity Phab. The club meets every Mon from 7.30–9.30pm at The Trinity Centre, Lickey Parish Hall to have fun, play games, do crafts or just chat – there's also a tuck shop! More info from Louise Boother on 07814 122990 or lickeyphabclub@hotmail.com

BEACON Ladies Club meets at 8pm on alternate Weds evenings at The Hawthorns Social Club, Rednal Hill Lane, Rednal. There is a

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varied programme of speakers and outings, including occasional visits to the theatre. New members of all ages welcome. £12 annual membership, plus £2 fortnightly. Call Barbara on 0121 445 3456 or Anita on 445 3770.

BARNT GREEN FRIENDSHIP CLUB meets every 3rd Tues of the month at 2.15pm at the Friends Meeting House, Barnt Green. Visitors £3 to include tea and biscuits. Members 50p. Ladies and gents both welcome. For more details call Rosalind on 0121 445 0598.

THE WORCESTER-BIRMINGHAM & DROITWICH CANALS SOCIETY holds regular monthly meetings in the meeting room behind The Weighbridge Pub, Scarfield Hill, Alvechurch on the first Tuesday of the month. There is usually a guest speaker. They promote the upkeep of the canals to ensure that the heritage is looked after for all to enjoy and are a registered charity. Find out more: www.wbdcs.org.uk or look on Facebook @wbdcs.org.uk. Please email contact@wbdcs.org.uk for further information. Meetings start at 7.45pm. Non-members are always welcome. Free entry.

THE WEDNESDAY CLUB usually meets on the second Weds each month at Alvechurch Cricket Club at 1.30pm, and offers the chance to make new friends, meet old ones and enjoy talks, demos and visits. Info from Janet on 0121 447 7870 or Lis on 0121 445 3895.

COFFEE, Cake and Chat is a place to meet new friends or catch up with old friends (includes a dedicated baby area) on the 4th Friday of each month 10:30am - 12noon at The Wheel, Blackwell. No charge, donations welcome. More info on 0121 445 1425.

BROMSGROVE (1982) PROBUS Club provides regular opportunities for retired professionals and businessmen to meet socially and share common interests. A members' meeting is held at Avoncroft Arts Centre on the 3rd Weds each month, 10am–12noon, including refreshments and a talk by a guest speaker. For more info visit www.bromsgroveprobus.co.uk or contact Jim on 01527 833531 bromsgrove1982probus.weebley.com

KINGFISHER PROBUS Club of Redditch is recruiting retired and semi-retired men to join them in a friendly environment. They meet every 2nd Thurs of the month at 11.30am at the Court Leet,174 Worcester Road, Bromsgrove B61 7AY, with a short meeting at noon then lunch followed by an interesting talk given by a visiting speaker. Partners/friends welcome to join for walks, trips, golf, skittles and special lunches. Contact Chris Bailey on 01527 835802 for confirmation of date and venue. More info at www.kingfisherprobusredditch.co.uk

LICKEY Hills Local History Society meets monthly at 7.30pm in the Trinity Centre, Old Birmingham Road, Lickey B45 8ES. Annual subscription £15. Non-members £3 per meeting. For more information please email info@lhlhs.org.uk or visit the website: www.lhlhs.org.uk

BROMSGROVE & Redditch Soroptimists meets every 2nd Thurs of the month at Burcot Village Hall. New members welcome – pop to a meeting, email sibrsoroptimist@gmail.com or ring 07812 985927.

ALVECHURCH Historical Society has a planned programme of talks on the first Monday of the month at 7.45pm at The Ark, St Laurence Church, Alvechurch. More details from Anne Humphries on 0121 445 5955. New members welcome.

BROMSGROVE ASTRONOMICAL SOCIETY meets on the 3rd Monday of each month at Bromsgrove Rugby Club. Doors open 7.30pm, speakers begin 7.45pm. Admission free on your first visit; refreshments available. Observing meetings are also held on the first Monday each month – bring your telescopes. More info via www.broms-astro.org.uk, www.facebook.com/bromsastro or emailing info@broms-astro.org.uk

ROTARY CLUB of Lickey Hills meets on Monday evenings, 7.15 for 7.30pm, at Hillscourt Conference Centre (NASUWT headquarters) on Rose Hill (B45 8RS). For details contact Graham Wiseman on 0121 460 1402.

SILVER THREADS, the Alvechurch club, meets on the first Weds each month at 2pm in Alvechurch Village Hall. You'll be sure of a welcome in this friendly atmosphere, where members can chat over a cup of tea. There are regular bingo sessions, and occasional days out. New members welcome. More info from Pat on 0121 447 8630.

WOODRUSH RUGBY Club "Old Dogs" meet at 8pm on the 2nd Thurs in the month at the Clubhouse, Icknield Street, 01564 822878. Open to all former players, social members and old friends for a social chat and the odd reminisce over a glass of beer. Join us: call Mike Betts on 07960 303254 or visit www.woodrushrfc.co.uk or info@woodrushrfc.co.uk

THE MACULAR Society Barnt Green Support Group meets on the last Fri of the month (with some exceptions) at The Parish Centre, behind St Andrew's Church, Sandhills Road, Barnt Green, B45 8NR, 2–4pm. Friendly, self-help group, proving there is more to life than this devastating eye condition. New members always welcome. For more info, ring Wendy on 0121 445 1585 or Alan on 01527 877864.

SPORT, FITNESS & HEALTH

UPTON WARREN SAILING CLUB sails throughout the year at Aztec (Upton Warren) opposite Webb's Garden Centre, Wychbold. A small, friendly club with both mixed fleet racing and cruising sessions. Most members sail their own boats but there are also club boats available for members to use. See www.uwsc.co.uk to find out more or contact membership@uwsc.co.uk

JOOLISM HIIT CLASSES. Semi-PT resistance training for ladies only in a well-equipped gym in Bromsgrove. For ladies who want toned and strong bodies. Attendance must be pre-booked via julie@joolismfitness.co.uk

WOODRUSH RUGBY FOOTBALL CLUB, Icknield Street, Alvechurch, B38 0EL is recruiting: Senior (Men & Ladies) U17 Colts Mini/Junior & Micros. Call 07341 256821 for recruitment or 01564 822878 (Clubhouse) email info@woodushrfc.co.uk or see: www.drushrfc.co.uk Facebook @WoodrushRFC

ALVECHURCH VILLAGE SOCIETY'S WALKS are held at 2pm of the first Sunday of the month unless noted otherwise. For walks starting outside the village, contact the walk leader if you need a lift. Occasionally, weather conditions mean that a walk must be cancelled at late notice: check with the leaders or the AVS website if unsure. Always wear appropriate footwear. Contact walks organiser Tony Brannon for more information about the walks: avswalks@gmail.com

The next walk will be the "Gorsey Lane Farm Triangle" on 5 February, led by Hilary Taylor. They will meet at The Crown, Withybed Lane, B48 7PN, call 0121 445 0107 for more information.

The group will meet again on 5 March for "A walk around Beoley", led by Sue and Roger Wardle. Meet at St Leonard's Church, Church Hill, Redditch, B98 9AR, call 07838737234 for more information.

BARNT GREEN FISHING CLUB controls the fishing (both game and coarse) on the Bittell Reservoirs. Interested parties - contact: bgfcmembership@outlook.com or Facebook @ Barnt Green Fishing Club.

REDDITCH & Bromsgrove Company of Archers meet April–Sept, Mon 6.30pm and Fri 6.30pm at Meadow Park Football Ground (by Harris Brush Works – outdoors) and Oct–March on Fri 6.30pm at Studley Leisure Centre (indoors). Really friendly no-pressure club. New members always welcome (juniors from 8 years old, seniors from 18 to 80+, seasoned archers or absolute beginners). Beginners' courses run throughout the year or taster sessions by appointment. Further info from rbcoaCoach@gmail.com, rbcoasecretary@gmail.com, or www.redditcharchers.org

REDDITCH Ramblers is a growing, friendly and sociable group offering a full walks programme including walks every Sat and Sun and a midweek walk most weeks. Sun walk is usually 6–9 miles; the Sat walk is more challenging, usually 10–12 miles. Midweek walks vary, sometimes morning walks followed by option of lunch or full day walking. The Saturday Strollers walk fortnightly (4–5 miles). Newcomers are always welcome and can walk three times with the group before deciding if they want to join. The group also arranges holidays, coach trips and social events throughout the year. Full info at redditch.ramblers@gmail.com or www.redditchramblers.org.uk

PHYSIOTHERAPY-LED Pilates Classes in Cofton Hackett, Barnt Green and Lickey Hills. Mixed ability Daytime and Evening classes available. Mother & Baby classes also run by Women's Health Physiotherapists. Small and welcoming classes aimed to improve balance, muscle tone and posture as well as overall body strength. Contact Elizabeth on 07850 604425 or elizabethalexanderltd@gmail.com or see www.elizabethalexanderphysiotherapy.com

CLUBBERCISE@ Alvechurch: Get sweat and glow! Get ready for exercise in disguise. You'll be dancing yourself happy and sweating until you sparkle, without even realising it. Mondays 7.30–8.30pm at Alvechurch School. All places MUST be pre-booked via www.leeshfitness.co.uk or 07541 625939.

POUND FITNESS@ Alvechurch: Channel your inner rockstar with this full body cardio-jam session. Using Ripstix®, lightly-weighted drumsticks engineered specifically for exercising, POUND transforms drumming into an incredibly effective way of working out. Weds 7.30–8.15pm at Alvechurch School. All places MUST be pre-booked via www.leeshfitness.co.uk or 07541 625939.

RELAXATION & MEDITATION for Everyone. Short, welcoming & inclusive classes with an experienced teacher at The Ark, Alvechurch, and online. An experiential approach to relaxation and meditation for a calm, clear mind and relaxed, balanced outlook. For more information, contact Sally: www.MyYogaMind.co.uk, classes@MyYogaMind.co.uk, 07903 663085.

BARNT GREEN Sailing Club offers regular sailing, either racing or casual sailing, in beautiful surroundings at Upper Bittell reservoir. For info contact secretary@bgsc.uk or see www.sailingbarntgreen.com

BRIAR Rose Field Archers is a field archery club based near Bromsgrove. There are two qualified coaches for those interested in taking up the sport. For information contact briarrosefieldarchers@gmail.com

YOGA Really Works: classes on Thurs evenings (term-time only), 7–8pm @Cotteridge Quaker Meeting House, Watford Road. Six-week blocks £45. Slow and mindful rhythmic movement in time with the breath. Accessible venue— classes open to wheelchair uses and less abled persons. Contact George on 07490 781637 or yogareallyworks@outlook.com, see www.yogareallyworks.co.uk or Facebook @ Yogareallyworks

THE RAMBLERS Bromsgrove Group: Guided walking with our group for pleasure, fitness and fun. Full programme of walks / events throughout the year.
More info at www.bromsgroveramblers.webs.com or Martin on 01527 857117 or Peter on 01527 558203.

ALVECHURCH WALKING Buddies: join a regular local walk with like-minded people who simply want to go on a local, sedate and friendly walk with no pressure. Well-behaved owners and their dogs are very welcome. The group meets at 10.30am every Thurs. For more info, search for 'alvwb' on Facebook or contact Tony on 07763 468893.

BROMSGROVE DISTRICT COUNCIL run a series of weekly health walks around Bromsgrove and its districts. The walks are usually steady in pace and led by qualified walk leaders, and free to attend. Where it exists, walks are often followed by guided sessions on the park gym equipment.
Blackwell Gentle Walk, Wednesdays, 10.30am, start opposite the entrance to St. Catherine's Church.
Lickey End Walking for Health, Tuesdays, 10am, meet at Lickey End Recreation Ground car park.
Oakalls and Harwood Park Health Walk, Wednesdays, 2pm, meet at The Oakalls Play Area.
Sanders Park Walk, Mondays, 9.50am for 10am start, meet at the café kiosk near the car park. There are three options: Short (30mins), Medium (2-3miles in 60-75mins), and Fast (3+ miles in 60mins).
Bromsgrove Rural Walk, Fridays, 9.45am for 10am departure, meet in the Sanders Park car park extension.These rural walks vary between 4 and 7 miles and can involve driving, a system of car sharing has been established.
Stoke Heath Health Walks, Thursdays, 10.30am, meet at Stoke Heath Recreation Ground.
Wythall Health Walk, Wednesday, 2pm, meet at Wythall car park B47 6LZ.

SOCIAL TENNIS takes place at Rubery Community & Leisure Centre, Holywell Lane, Rubery B45 9AD on Mondays from 1–3pm. The group would welcome a few more players – just turn up or ring Don on 01527 759 318.

SARACEN Cycling Club is seeking new members. Men, ladies, beginners, and regular riders are all welcome. The long-established club meets regularly by the Tardebigge Pub on Thurs at 10am and Sun at 9.45am. See www.saracenroadclub.com or call Ivor on 0121 453 2287.

LONGBRIDGE Cycling Club meets weekly on Tues and either Sat or Sun. Ride pace generally at 9-11mph overall average, varied distances. Hotel and hostel weekends away, cycle camping adventures, social outings and much more. All ages, beginners, and seasoned cyclists all welcome. Call or text Deb on 07738 982161, email debweston@aol.com or see www.longbridgecyclingclub.com or Facebook @longbridgecyclingclub

MERCIAN NORDIC WALKING: come and try a taster session for fun, fitness and friendship. More info at www.merciannordicwalking.co.uk Online fitness and personal training available at www.mercianfitness.co.uk

ALVECHURCH Cricket Club Pavilion is available for hire: weekdays for community groups/clubs/societies, evening functions/private parties. Licensed bar, dance floor, kitchen area and great outdoor space. Enquiries to Stuart Brereton via 07775 714165 or ahcc.bar@gmail.com

PILATES Mat classes and 1:1 (apparatus). Irrespective of age, lifestyle, health and ability, we could all benefit from listening to our bodies: tuning in to our needs, building connections throughout the body, focusing on detail; challenging what is strong, building what is weaker, balancing the body to move away from pain and discomfort towards greater resilience and independence. Book a 1:1 apparatus session (Barnt Green) or a mat class (Rowney Green). Call 07759 590830 or see www.steffaffleck.co.uk

BARNT Green Sports Club (Margesson Drive, Barnt Green, B45 8LR) offers racquet sports in a friendly environment, plus running and cycling groups. Clubhouse with licensed bar. More info from Nick Butcher on 0121 445 1978 or visit www.barntgreensportsclub.co.uk

CATSHILL FC offers youth coaching sessions each Saturday morning at Catshill Middle School, Meadow Road, Catshill, B61 0JW. Boys and girls from Reception age upwards are welcome. Contact Gary on 07462 118920 or see www.catshillfc.co.uk for further info.

BROMSGROVE & REDDITCH Badminton Club welcomes players for social and league play. Playing Sunday evenings 5.40 to 7.40pm. Details from Steve Whittaker 07805 051456.

PILATES with Lottie Newberry: Physiotherapy-led Pilates classes every Monday in Alvechurch in the day and Barnt Green in the evening. Contact Lottie on lottienewberrypilates@hotmail.com. All abilities welcome.

COMMUNITY Exercise Classes at Alvechurch Baptist Church, run by Bromsgrove council: Active Seniors on Tues 9.30–10.30am. and Zumba Gold on Thurs 1–2pm (each £3.50 per session). Fully-qualified, insured instructors on hand to help. For more info, call 01527 881289 or visit at www.bromsgrove.gov.uk/things-to-do/active-bromsgrove

YOGA for Every-Body. Friendly & Inclusive classes in Blackwell, Alvechurch and online with an experienced teacher. A slow but powerful approach to yoga, which encourages free, natural alignment of the body, whilst building strength, flexibility and relaxed awareness. Contact Sally: www.MyYogaMind.co.uk, classes@MyYogaMind.co.uk, 07903663085.

TAI CHI (Qigong) sessions in Alvechurch Village Hall on Mon 10–11am and Friday 10.30. Qigong is an integration of physical postures, breathing techniques, and focused intentions. More details Nige on 07966069956 or nige@mindfulmoves.co.uk

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FIVE WAYS Old Edwardians' Cricket Club at Ash Lane, Hopwood: Junior, Men's and Women's teams, come and join in! Open to all. Excellent facilities. Everyone welcome. Coaching for juniors on Fri evenings May to Aug. Contact Mark Tovey on 01527 835031.

NEW Ravens (North East Worcestershire Ravens Rugby League Club) is now based at Forshaw Heath Lane, Portway, B94 5LH. Junior training and 'little leaguers' take place on Sun mornings from 10.30am, with open-age and touch on Weds evenings from 7pm. All welcome at this family-orientated club. Contact Gail on 07515 020844 or Jason on 07957 248464 visit www.newravens.net

KINGS Norton Rhinos offers contact and non-contact rugby for children from Reception to Year 12. A safe and friendly introduction to rugby – and plenty of outdoor fun and exercise! Training takes place at KNRFC Ash Lane, Hopwood, on Sundays from 9.30–11.30am. Contact Simon Thompson on 07968 424585 or visit www.knrfc.co.uk

HOPWOOD Ladies Cycling Club meets at Hopwood Playing Field on Tuesdays at 11.30am and Wednesdays at 9.30am. For information, visit www.hopwoodladiescyclingclub.co.uk or phone Sheila Evans on 07779 530017.

MARTIAL ARTS Kickboxing/Karate at The Ark Tuesdays 6.30-7.30. For more information please visit www.forcecombatmartialarts.co.uk

SLIMMING WORLD at Cofton Village Hall, on Wednesdays 9:30am, 5:30pm and 7:30pm. Call Nikki for more information: 0778814817

ASSERTIVENESS AND HELPING SKILLS DONINGTON TRAINING runs classes at Alvechurch Village Hall. Easy, enjoyable and effective learning. Wednesdays from 19th January, pay what you think and can afford, any profits go to The Village Hall. For info: http://tinyurl.com/DTcdates or John Talbut (0121) 445 4607.

CHILDREN & FAMILIES

BABY Bounce & Rhyme is at Alvechurch Library Mondays 10–10.30am. Sing-a-long to traditional nursery rhymes and action songs.

STORYTIME at Alvechurch Library is on Tuesdays 11–11.30. Silly stories and tall tales for pre-school children to enjoy with parents and carers.

DRAMA TOTS: Award-winning imaginary play classes for children 8 months to 5 years. Classes run term-time on Monday mornings in Alvechurch/Thursdays in Finstall (other days/venues available). Contact Jo 07738 969460 for details.

TINY CHURCH (stay and play for under-5s and their carer) meets in Holy Trinity Church, Lickey, each Weds from 11.15am–12.30pm during term times. Games, toys, snacks and stories, and a time to meet together with God. Just pop along, ring 0121 445 1425 or email clive.rushton@btinternet.com

EVERY SCOUT GROUP in Bromsgrove (which includes Barnt Green, Blackwell, Catshill, Finstall and Lickey as well as the town centre) currently has girls and boys aged 6-18 waiting to join, their numbers restricted by the ratio of adults to young people. A few more adults helping would enable existing leaders to open more Beaver, Cub, Scout and Explorer units allowing more young people to experience Scouting and learn skills for life. If you could spare a few hours each month please contact us on 07539 031740 or visit scoutshw.org.uk

THE NATIONAL CHILDBIRTH TRUST (NCT) runs ever-popular antenatal and postnatal courses to grow your knowledge and your network, allowing you to feel prepared and confident moving into the next chapter of your life. Discover and learn with other local parents-to-be, make vital connections and life-long friends in your community. Courses are held at St Andrew's Church, Barnt Green. Visit www.nct.org.uk/courses-workshops or call 0300 330 0700.

ROWNEY GREEN PRE-SCHOOL offers learning through play for children from two years to school age, Tues–Thurs 9am–2pm, term-time only. Call 07522 926286 or see Facebook.

SOLIHULL BABY MASSAGE is at Rowney Green Village Hall on Tuesday's. A relaxed environment for parents and babies to bond through massage. Visit www.solihullbabymassage.co.uk

FINSTALL Pre-school in Finstall Village Hall, Mon–Thur 9.15am–1pm (term-time only). Led by a qualified teacher. Visits welcome. Call 07903 560787 or email Finstallpreschool@hotmail.com

RHYTHM TIME is a fun, award-winning developmental music classes for the under 5's. Classes in Alvechurch, Barnt Green, Bromsgrove, Redditch and lots more. Contact Vicky 07712 675 697 or visit www.rhythmtime.net

NEW ROAD PARENTS SUPPORT for parents of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Trans children meets monthly in Bromsgrove. A confidential, voluntary, small support group for parents by parents. Close links with FFLAG. Visit www.newroadparents.org, email newroadparents@gmail.com or get in touch via Facebook @New Road Parents Lgbtqi+ Support Group.

THEATRETRAIN Bromsgrove, performing arts for children 4-18yrs. Saturdays 10.30am-1.30pm. For a half-price trial email bromsgrove@theatretrain.co.uk or call 07766 724834.

GAMES & COMPETITIONS

SHIRLEY & WYTHALL CHESS CLUB meets at Wythall Community Association in Silver Street, Wythall, B47 6LZ, every Thurs from 7.30pm. The club has four teams playing in competitive leagues. Friendly atmosphere. New players are most welcome, just turn up or contact Barry Knee on 01564 826250

SPADESBOURNE Bridge Club plays at Amphlett Hall, Crown Close, Bromsgrove B61 8DW. Join the group for friendly bridge in a pleasant venue on Thurs evenings, 7pm for a 7.15 start. They aim to finish by 10pm. Table money for visitors is £3. Details from Jan on 01905 772256.

MONDAY Bridge Club at Barnt Green Friends Meeting House would like to welcome a few new members – for more info contact the organiser, Des Clarke, on 0121 453 3034.

FRIDAY Bridge Club meets at Burcot Village Hall every Friday evening. We play friendly, competitive Bridge in comfortable surrounds. We meet at 18:45 for a prompt start at 19:00. Refreshments are provided free of charge. For full details please contact the Secretary Ed Payne on 07950951122 or visit www.bridgewebs.com/friday

BROMSGROVE Bridge Club plays every Tuesday evening from 7.25 to 10.30pm at The Court Leet (a Hungry Horse Pub) 174 Worcester Road, Bromsgrove, B61 7AY. We are very friendly and welcome guests or potential new members, with or without a partner. The club is affiliated to the English Bridge Union and the Worcestershire Contract Bridge Association. Contact the Secretary, Sally Flood, on 01527 832468 or sallyflood@gmail.com

BROMSGROVE Board Gamers is a friendly group which meets at 7.30pm each Weds at the Ladybird Inn, Aston Fields. More info on Facebook 'Bromsgrove Board Gamers'.

BARNT Green Duplicate Bridge Club meets at St Andrew's Church Hall each Weds afternoon and would like new members – contact Liz on 07538 092296.

ART, CRAFT & LITERATURE

THE WITHYBED POETS are local people who write poetry and share it with each other. You don't have to live in Withybed Green, though most of our meetings are there. We meet regularly every six weeks or so. We like to read to local audiences and some of us write "poetry on request." For more information, contact mail@marygreen.plus.com.

PAINTING & DRAWING If you enjoy painting and drawing, try this friendly community group which meets in the Rubery Leisure Centre, Holywell Lane, on Monday mornings, 9am-1pm, catering for all ages and abilities. The facilities are excellent for both indoor and outdoor working depending on personal preference and weather conditions. Tea and coffee is provided. Places are available. For further information telephone: 0121 453 7716 (Fridays).

COMMON THREAD: Bring your knitting, crochet, patchwork, sewing etc. All are welcome. Friendly help and chat. Meets on the last Saturday of each month (apart from Christmas Day, of course!) in The Wheel at St. Catherine's, Blackwell B60 1BN. Please bring your own drink to stay covid safe. Further information from Angela Bevan 0121 477 9924.

THE "CRAFTY LADIES" craft group meets every Monday morning in Alvechurch Library from 10am–1pm, with knitting, crocheting, sewing, quilting etc. More info on 01905 822722.

BURCOT WOODTURNING CLUB offers a friendly meeting place for woodturners of all abilities and experience. A varied programme includes demos, talks, hands-on practical evenings and visits to exhibitions. The group meets on the first Thurs each month, 7.15–9.30pm at Burcot Village Hall. Visit www.burcotwoodturners.org.uk

ALVECHURCH LIBRARY is available to host day and short courses such as card-making or scrapbooking. If you have a skill to teach or share and would like to rent a space, call the Hub on 01905 822722 and ask for Alvechurch Library.

AVONCROFT ARTS SOCIETY at Avoncroft Arts Centre (Redditch Road, Bromsgrove B60 4JR), runs tutored/ non-tutored classes in Art, Textiles, Ceramics, Embroidery and Dance. Contact AAS on 01527 833829 or avoncroft-arts@btconnect.com

ALVECHURCH ART GROUP meets at the Baptist Hall (rear of church) every Tues from 1–3.30pm, using all mediums except oil. All welcome, especially beginners. Friendly tuition. Call Paul on 0121 445 5437 or drop in.

ALVECHURCH LIBRARY Readers Group meets in the library on the last Tues of the month from 2pm–3.30pm. New members always welcome. And don't forget that you can access online audio and e-books 24/7, free of charge, by downloading the Borrowbox app. Visit www.worcestershire.gov.uk/libraries

LICKEY HILLS ART SOCIETY, a friendly bunch of artists and those interested in art, meet at Longbridge Methodist Church, Bristol Road, B45 9TY, on the first Sat each month at 7.30pm. Open to artists and non-artists alike. For more info email Lyn lyndasharp2010@yahoo.com or come along – the members would love to see you.

SEW TOGETHER meets on Tuesday mornings from 9.30am to 12.30pm during term time at the new Cofton Village hall. They meet weekly to sew and socialise. All abilities are welcome and there are a variety of sewing machines to borrow if required. For more information contact Avril on sewtogether64@gmail.com or see Sew Together Cofton Hackett on Facebook.

BARNT GREEN ART CLUB meets at Barnt Green Scout and Guide HQ in Blackwell Road, Barnt Green. Tuesday morning and Tuesday afternoon sessions. Workshops with visiting tutors during each term. There is a waiting list, but enquiries from improvers and intermediate artists welcomed. Jackie: 0121 445 4745.

MARLBROOK QUILTERS meet on the 1st Wednesday of the month at Avoncroft Arts Centre, Redditch Road, Stoke Heath, Bromsgrove B60 4JR. They are a small friendly group who would like to welcome new members. For more information contact Maggie Forknell 07973 313034 or Sheila Nunnerley 0121 445 2238.

GARDENS & FLOWERS

BLACKWELL COMMUNITY GARDEN in the grounds of St Catherine, Blackwell. Pop along to help water, plant and harvest. Info on 0121 445 1425.

ROWNEY GREEN HORTICULTURAL SOCIETY meet at the Village Hall on the second Thursday each month at 7.15pm. On Thursday 9 February they will welcome Duncan Coombes to give a talk; "Colour and Texture in the Garden". Duncan recently retired from Pershore College where he was a lecturer in amenity horticulture for 30 years. He is an avid plantsman and has visited China many times, including several plant hunting trips to Yunnan where our Victorian forbears discovered so many of the plants we currently enjoy in our gardens. Guests are always welcome £3.50 include coffee and biscuits. For more information please telephone Lindsay Smith on 01527592874.

DODFORD GARDENING CLUB meets on the 2nd Monday each month (except August) usually in Dodford Village Hall at 7.45pm. New members and visitors welcome. More info at www.dodfordgardeningclub.co.uk or call Penny on 07706 153618.

ROWNEY GREEN FLOWER CLUB, held at the Hall: You don't have to be a flower arranger to enjoy the friendly company of our members, while watching beautiful flowers being transformed into an amazing arrangement. For more info contact Felicity on 07812 336263

BROMSGROVE FLOWER CLUB holds regular monthly meetings on the 3rd Thursday of each month. Meets at 2pm, at All Saints Church Hall, Burcot Lane, Bromsgrove B601AF. A yearly membership is available or come as a visitor & dip in & out. Refreshments & then a demonstration of flower arrangements and a raffle and you may be lucky and take one home. Further information on 0121 445 1915.

SOLIHULL & District Orchid Society meets on the 1st Sat each month at St George & St Teresa's Parish Centre, Station Road, Dorridge B39 8EZ. New members and visitors welcome. For more information or advice you can call Monica Johnson on 01926 747822 or email at kenneth.johnson99@ntlworld.com. You can also visit www.solihullorchidsociety.co.uk to see more.

HELP & ADVICE

POPPIES' is a monthly bereavement support group — contact Rev Sheri Gidney on 0121 445 1185 for details.

DIVORCED/separated and having trouble seeing your children? Being excluded from their lives? The ASSOCIATION FOR SHARED PARENTING has been helping mums and dads in the family court system and problems over contact and residence for over 20 years. Visit www.associationforsharedparenting.org.uk

REPAIR CAFE is for those looking to save their money and fix broken or faulty household items. The Repair Cafe is part of an international network that keeps faulty appliances and clothes out of landfill and offers 'a cuppa' and a slice of cake to visitors while they wait. Visit the Repair Shop on the first Saturday of every month 2-5pm at All Saints Hall, Burcot Lane, B60 1AD. For more info: 07804251731 or repaircafebromsgrove@gmail.com

ALVECHURCH LIBRARY hosts one-to-one Computer Sessions for people wanting to learn the basics. If you need help with emails or advice on surfing online then pop in to arrange for free tuition, provided by volunteers. They can also help with online applications for Blue Badges and bus passes. For more info call The Hub on 01905 822722 and ask for Alvechurch Library.

GUIDE DOGS are looking for volunteers who could give a few hours of their time to help someone locally and living with sight loss, get out and about. Volunteer sighted guides support the person they are partnered with to feel part of the community. No previous experience is necessary, full training will be provided and the role is extremely flexible! For more information email MidlandsMSG@guidedogs.org.uk or visit www.guidedogs.org.uk

WOMEN'S INSTITUTES

FINSTALL CROSS WI meets at Finstall Village Hall on the second Tuesday of the month at 7.30pm. For more info see www.finstallcross-wi.wordpress.com or email finstallcrosswi@gmail.com

BEOLEY WI meets on the first Tuesday of each month in Beoley Village Hall at 7.00pm. More info from Joan Lovett on 01527 584047 or email beoleysec@wfedwi.org.uk

BENTLEY PAUNCEFOOT WI meets at 7.30pm on the second Tues every month at Bentley Village Hall (B97 5TB). More information from Helen Spence on 01527 822611 or email bentleypauncefootsec@wfedwi.org.uk

BARNT GREEN WI meets at the Baptist Church at 7.30pm on the 3rd Thursday of the month. For more information: Jenny Jellie 07983 865372.

BROMSGROVE BELLES WI meets on the second Monday each month at the Meeting Room at St Godwald's Church at 7.30pm. For more info, contact President Helen Holbeche at helenholbeche@gmail.com

ALVECHURCH WI meets on the second Monday each month in Alvechurch Village Hall, at 7.30pm. For more information email Mariea Clarke clarke.mariea@gmail.com or alvechurchpres@wfedwi.org.uk

LICKEY WI usually meets on the first Tues every month at 7.30pm in the Parish Hall (Trinity

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Centre), Old Birmingham Road, Lickey. More info from Jenny Ryder on 0121 445 1872, Lickeywi@gmail.com or www.lickeywi.wordpress.com

HILLSIDE AT ALVECHURCH WI meets at 7.45pm on the first Weds each month at The Ark, Alvechurch. For more info call Pat McDonagh on 0121 628 4121.

BLACKWELL & BURCOT WI meets at Burcot Village Hall on the second Weds each month, at 2pm. For info call President Mrs Barbara Knight on 0121 445 3456.

FINSTALL & COFTON HACKETT WI meets on the first Monday of the month at Finstall Village Hall at 2pm. For more info call President Val Wheeler on 01527 874518.

HOPWOOD WI meets at Hopwood Village Hall on the first Thurs of the month at 7.30pm. For more information call Ann Thurrell on 0121 447 7668.

ST CATHERINE'S BLACKWELL WI meets on the 4th Wednesday each month at 7.30pm at Burcot Village Hall. Contact Sue Barrett for more information on 01527 596092 or susan-barratt222@gmail.com

RUBERY WI meets on the 2nd Weds of the month at 7.30pm at Beacon Church Centre, Whetty Lane, when there are speakers, activities and competitions. The 4th Weds of each month is the craft evening. Non-members are welcome. Anyone can just drop in on either night. Contact Judie1055@yahoo.co.uk 07810765314.

VILLAGE VENUES FOR HIRE

HOPWOOD VILLAGE HALL is available for hire for parties, groups and gatherings. Please contact Booking Secretary Ann Thurrell on 0121 447 7668 or visit www.hopwoodvillagehall.co.uk

TARDEBIGGE COMMUNITY HALL for hire: large, bright facility for functions, clubs, societies and all activities. To book call 07763 446902 or email tchbookings@gmail.com

THE WHEEL COMMUNITY ROOM IN BLACKWELL has daytime, evening and weekend availability for one-off and regular hire —more info on 0121 445 1425.

THE TRINITY CENTRE IN LICKEY has evening and weekend availability for one-off and regular hire – more info on 0121 445 1425.

BARNT GREEN PARISH CENTRE has large and medium sized lounges available for regular hire for some morning and early afternoon sessions each week. Please contact the Parish Administrator on 0121 447 7097.

Community Meeting Room Hire Available

ENQUIRE TODAY FOR MORE INFORMATION

BARNT GREEN QUAKER MEETING HOUSE
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TIME TO TALK?

YOU MIGHT have heard of Redditch or Bromsgrove Community Sheds. Bromsgrove Shed is in Stoke Prior, and you'll find Redditch Community Shed in the Kingfisher Centre, with good public transport links.

Both Redditch and Bromsgrove Sheds are part of the Men's Shed movement. The original aim of the movement was to improve the health and well-being of older men. Men in general aren't very good at asking for help and a lot of them lose touch with their friends and support network when they retire. The Shed movement was started to set up small workshops that would give them somewhere to go and someone to talk to.

The Shed motto is "Shoulder to Shoulder" and reflects the fact that older men can find it very difficult to talk about their troubles face to face. Talking becomes much easier if you're working at a bench next to somebody who's also being busy.

Many Sheds have broadened their membership to include men and women of all ages, including Redditch Community Shed. Although woodworking is still the main activity, all other crafts are welcome. The Shed is open everyone; and if you've no skills then there are people happy to share and help.

The Shed is open Tuesdays and Thursdays from 10:00 to 2:00.

■ More details at facebook.com/redditchcommunitysheds or email redditchshed@gmail.com.

Church strive to shake off Cup-run hangover

Alvechurch FC's league form remains in the doldrums after the excitement of last autumn's FA Cup run.

The side conceded three goals for the fourth league game in a row at Basford United in January on their way to a third defeat in the last four.

The fact that Basford themselves had only one league win in seven games only added to the head-scratching over what could be behind the lack of league form.

While lurking only fourth from bottom in the Southern Central league as *The Village* went to press, there is still plenty of time for The Church to turn the season around because they have so many games in hand from postponements during their cup runs.

And there is still a glimmer of hope from yet another knockout run, this time in the Birmingham Senior Cup, where Alvechurch squeaked into the quarter-finals after a penalty shoot-out against a strong Boldmere Saint Michael side.

A tightly fought game saw Alvechurch score a last-minute equaliser on 90 minutes thanks to a header from captain Jamie Willets making it 2-2.

A very solid series of penalties ended when Church debutant Josh Dugmore scored to secure victory and a place in the quarter finals at home against either Aston Villa or Tividale.

Josh Dugmore in action for Alvechurch FC. *Picture*/Ian Macvie

Comings and goings

RIGHT-BACK Josh Dugmore has joined Alvechurch from National League North side Banbury United.

Josh started his football career with Birmingham City under-18s and has also played for Bromsgrove Sporting and Telford United .

Left-back Ethan Sephton has left the club to join National League North side Boston United. Ethan joined Alvechurch as a 14-year-old and worked his way through the ranks. Joining the club at left back is Jamie Melbourne, who has played for both the West Bromwich Albion youth side and Stoke City's under-18s.

The club has appointed Kevin Redmond as Head of Community to work closely with schools, disability, tiny tekkers and Wildcats.

Kevin was a baton bearer at the Commonwealth Games and announced a homegrown hero due to his community work, particularly with cerebral palsy sport.

AFC FIXTURES

League matches unless stated.

Due to the FA cup run and match postponements the club now has to fit in more than league matches by Saturday 22nd April, with matches on seven consecutive Tuesdays.

JANUARY

24th St Ives Town (a) 7.45
28th Hednesford Town (a) 3.00
31st Needham Market (a) 7.45

FEBRUARY

4th Nuneaton Borough (h) 3.00
7th Mickleover Sports (h) 7.45
11th Leiston (a) 3.00
14th Bromsgrove Sporting (h) 7.45
18th St Ives Town (h) 3.00
21st Rushall Olympic (h) 7.45
25th Mickleover Sports (a) 3.00

MARCH

4th Kings Langley (h) 3.00
6th Stourbridge (a) 7.45
11th Royston Town (a) 3.00
18th Stratford Town (a) 3.00
25th Bedford Town (h) 3.00

Supporters' support

ALVECHURCH FC supporters have set up an association to raise money for the club and improve facilities to boost the match-day experience for both home and away supporters

All supporters are welcome and the next meeting is on Wednesday February 1 at 7.30pm at The Hayes. See Twitter @ *Alvechurch Fanzone* and WhatsApp *Alvechurch Supporters*

Tales of goals and wickets on the menu

A PAIR of entertaining speakers have been lined up for the Alvechurch FC Sporting Luncheon in April.

Dean Saunders, ex-Aston Villa, Liverpool, Derby County and Welsh international forward (plus a number of management positions) will be joined by former England cricket captain Graham Gooch, the most prolific run scorer of his generation with more than 17,000 first-class runs. The event is being held on April 28 at The Hayes, Redditch Road, Kings Norton,Birmingham B38 8LR, starting at noon.

A table for ten is £650, with individual tickets £70.

For more information and to book, contact Carl Jordan, Commercial Manager, Alvechurch Football Club, on 07749 327059 or email: carlfjordan@yahoo.co.uk

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